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PEARLS FROM BONES:  
RELICS, CHORTENS, TERTONS AND THE SIGNS OF  
SAINTLY DEATH IN TIBET\*

DAN MARTIN

*Summary*

Although there has been much work, in recent years, on the *sacrum* of Christianity, and some important studies have appeared on Buddhist relic cults and related facets of Buddhism, so far very little has been written on Tibetan Buddhist relics. This paper, while offering some material for a historical perspective, mainly seeks to find a larger cultural pattern for understanding the interrelationships of a complex of factors active in Tibetan religious culture. Beginning with problems of relic-related terms and classifications, we then suggest a new assessment of the role of the Terton ('treasure revealer'). Then we discuss 'miracles' in Tibet, and the intersection of categories of 'signs of saintly death' and relics. Much of the remaining pages are devoted to those items that fall within both categories, specifically the 'pearls' that emerge miraculously from saintly remains and images that appear in bodily or other substances connected with cremations. After looking at a number of testimonials on these miraculous relics, we examine the possibility that these items might be 'deceitfully manufactured', looking at a few Tibetan polemical writings which raise this possibility. In the conclusion, we suggest that there are some critical links between three spheres of Tibetan religiosity: 1. *sacrum* which are not relics, 2. relics, and 3. signs of sainthood. Finally, we recommend an approach to religious studies that takes its point of departure in actual practices, and particularly the objects associated with popular devotional practice.

Tibetans have, and have had, very highly developed cults of relics, as does North African Islam and as did medieval Christianity, to give a few instances. The reasons are in all three cases approximately the same. Buddha, Muhammed and Jesus, regardless of other differences, all had human bodies; all died. All of them being, in some sense, revealers of historical religions, they as well as the later saints in their traditions have tended to sanctify everything and everyone with which or with whom they came into contact. This admitted, it will be rather obvious that the physical things in the most intimate association with them, in particular their physical remains (if available),<sup>1</sup> should above all be held worthy of the greatest respect and reverence. In the experience of the believer, however, the relics are no more merely passive and

unresponsive objects of worship than the living revealers or saints themselves could possibly be. Something palpable is given in return for their veneration, something we might call grace or blessing. What the Moroccan Maraboutist calls *baraka*<sup>2</sup> and the early medieval Christian might have called *charis* ('gift') or *dynamis* ('force', 'power'),<sup>3</sup> a Tibetan would call *byin-rlabs*.

*Byin-rlabs* is commonly glossed as 'gift wave',<sup>4</sup> but it more properly goes back to a literal translation of a Chinese word<sup>5</sup> which was almost certainly made during the earliest introduction of Buddhism into Tibet in the seventh or eighth centuries. It is not a literal translation of the Sanskrit Buddhists term *adhiṣṭhāna*.<sup>6</sup> Its actual, or rather its philologically correct, meaning is 'received by (way of) giving'. The believer receives a 'gift' from the saint (in person or in vision), relic or consecrated article. The nature of the 'gift' is and always will remain a mystery to those most secularly oriented persons who have existed in all times and places. For the sake of definition it will be sufficient for our present purposes to say that, no matter what qualities we may wish to include in our concept of sanctity or spirituality, this 'gift' is intended to assist in the development of those same qualities in the receiving individual. It is a gift that, indeed, depends on the receptivity of the individual (faith, and so forth), and hence the bafflement of the learned scholars confronted with this most popular religion practiced by adherents of all Tibetan schools. Sanctity is a quality possessed by particular persons and things. Therefore, to speak about 'the holy' without any reference to those things that are holy is equivalent, to my way of thinking, to discussing 'brilliance' without mentioning what sort of things might be brilliant, such as a lightbulb, an actor, a scientist, a reflection, or a sunset.

In contrast to the paucity of English words, Tibetan has two most commonly used words for relics in general and several less common ones. The first general term, *gdung*, or *sku-gdung*, is the honorific word for 'bone' (also, 'ancestry', 'clan') but its meaning is often extended to mean 'remains' in general. The other, *ring-bsrel*, means, etymologically speaking, 'kept for a long time', hence, 'cherished'. The English word 'relic', coming from Latin by way of French, means 'remains' or 'something left over'. One of the less common Tibetan terms is '*phel-gdung* ('increasing bone'), a word

which has a more restricted meaning. Another, *sha-rí-ram*, is a straight transliteration from the Sanskrit word for ‘body’, which is used in Tibetan interchangeably with *ring-bsrel*, both of these words (as well as *gdung*) occasionally having a more specific meaning. Finally, there is *byin-rten*.

*Byin-rten*<sup>7</sup> is a contracted form of *byin-rlabs-kyi rten*, which we may translate, ‘blessing support/receptacle’. The word *rten* is difficult to render precisely, having connotations of ‘support, dependency, prop, container’, and so forth. It is used in several terms which have a bearing on our subject. The Tibetan Buddhist world has three major classifications (sometimes increasing to five<sup>8</sup>) of things worthy of worship. The first is ‘Body receptacles’ (*sku-rten*), the images of Buddhas, deities and saints. The second is ‘Speech receptacles’ (*gsung-rten*), the words of Buddhas and saints embodied in sacred texts of all sorts. The third is ‘Thought receptacles’ (*thugs-rten*). This third is, for all intents and purposes, identical with the chorten (*mchod-rten*).<sup>9</sup>

The chorten is well known to many as the Tibetan counterpart to the *stûpa*, *caitya*, *dagoba* (from *dhâtugarbha*, ‘relic container’), pagoda, etc., of South, Southeast and East Asian architecture. Here we are not so concerned with the form of the chorten, which literally means ‘worship’ (*mchod*), ‘receptacle’ (*rten*) and functionally (also, I believe, in origin) acts as a reliquary, as with the objects it is meant to contain. Not all relics are always kept in chortens; but we may, I think more or less correctly, assume temporarily that everything that *is* placed inside a chorten is considered to be a relic. By examining what articles are included when a chorten is consecrated,<sup>10</sup> we will have a fairly complete picture of what things have been classified as relics as well as a beginning toward discovering how different particular Tibetans or groups of Tibetans have subclassified them.

For this purpose, we may feel fortunate to have a large number of accounts of the construction of chortens by a wide variety of authors. These were written with the basic motive of cataloguing the materials, styles and workmanship used in their construction and thus memorializing the merit of the craftsmen and donors as well as the deceased saint in whose honor it might have been built, as well as eulogizing the chorten and its surroundings as a holy

place and describing the spiritual and other benefits to be derived from visiting it or doing the ritual circumambulations and so on. We will provide summarized samplings of some of these Guides, or 'Indices' (*dkar-chag*), which have been chosen in an attempt to represent all the Tibetan sects, beginning with one from the early seventeenth century. These have been placed in an appendix since, although they supply the basic starting points (the 'data') for much of our discussion, these listings of relics will not be of impelling interest to the majority of readers. A brief look at the appendix will be sufficient for most purposes.

### *What Does the Evidence Tell Us?*

We will not be able to deal here with certain aspects of the relic cult in Tibet due, in part, to a shortage of information. At this stage, we could not pretend to give social science analyses along the lines of patron-client relations, community structures and so on. It is much more regrettable not to be able to supply evidence for the impact of relics on people, either as individuals or as social entities. (Pilgrimage Guides and biographies should prove helpful here.) Were miraculous healings at chortens as frequent a phenomenon as they were at medieval European saints' shrines? (At present, my impression is that they were not.) Did the role of relics in Tibetan culture change in significant ways over time? How do various aspects of the Tibetan relic cults relate to Indian, Chinese, or Khotanese (or other Central Asian) prototypes? Is there anything uniquely Tibetan about it?<sup>11</sup> These and many other questions, as important as they may be for a well-considered view of the subject, will have to find answers in the future, although some evidence supplied here may be found useful.

The evidence does tell us, first of all, that while all schools of Tibetan religion regard the same general sorts of things as relics, there seems to have been no generally accepted sub-classification scheme in use. Within the Gelugpa sect, there appears to have been a rather standard three- or four-fold classification, while the Nyingma (and possibly the Kargyudpa and Bonpo as well) preferred five-fold classifications. A much larger body of evidence would need to be collected in order to substantiate even this very basic statement.

By looking at the origins of the individual relics, we can easily detect sectarian affiliations. Lha-btsun's Guide contains mostly Nyingma, but also Kargyudpa, relics and nothing connected with other sects. Zhu-chen's Guide contains predominantly Sakyapa relics, and it does not include the 'images' or 'increasing bone' (with the exception of two from the Buddha, and this apparently for reasons of controversy to be clarified in due course). Gung-thang-pa's list emphasizes bodily and contact relics of Gelugpa saints, although not exclusively. Kong-sprul's Guide contains mostly Bonpo relics, but also consecrated articles and relics from all the other major sects, as we might expect, it being sponsored by a 'nonsectarian' (*ris-med-pa*).

As for the nature of the relics as such, they may mostly be described as the physical remains of the saints or things sanctified by close proximity to them. The special types which may not appear to fit with this description will be discussed later on. We may note that, with few exceptions, the saints in question are both male and clergy. There is only one bone relic derived from a woman. If we limit ourselves to clearly historical personages (excluding Buddhas, ancient sages, and so forth), there are about 57 cloistered religious men, seven lay or uncloistered religious men, and three 'holy madmen'. These numbers are *not* scientifically accurate, being based only on the material produced in evidence in the appendix, otherwise the proportion of cloistered religious men would be even higher.

Various bodily emissions constitute a significant minority of the relics: blood, urine, reproductive substances, mucus (handkerchiefs). Many of these relics, especially the testicles included in Lha-btsun's Guide, carry almost too obvious associations of vitality, reproduction and growth. The theme of an underlying vitality adhering to the mortal remains of saints finds its strongest expression in the miraculous multiplication of relics referred to as 'increasing bone' (*'phel-gdung*) which will be dealt with below. The closest to a European equivalent we can point to is the liquefaction of blood. Although not *really* equivalent, both are examples of how seemingly inert, 'dead' substances can take on life, especially in response to devotion directed their way.<sup>12</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, the vitality of the relic is in no way reduced by its division and

translation. There is little hint of the resistance to the division of the saints' physical remains such as was noticeable in early medieval European relic cults.<sup>13</sup> This undoubtedly reflects the fact that Tibetan Buddhists, like other Buddhists and unlike Christians, have no widely shared idea of bodily resurrection. The cremated remains of the Buddha Himself were immediately divided into eight portions. Ordinarily, dead bodies are quickly consigned to the elements (through burial, cremation, submersion or exposure, which may be understood as earth, fire, water and air 'burial'), although embalming is done in some extraordinary cases for highly regarded teachers (the embalming salts then becoming greatly valued as relics).

Finally, the Guides may tell us that the cults of saints were closely connected to the cults of holy places. While earth, stones, and plants from holy places are never included under the classification 'relic', yet they are mentioned in all the Guides studied, and this is surely not without significance. We may speak not only of 'relics of geography', but also of a geography of relics; for while relics most generally stay where they have been deposited, making pilgrimage necessary, they may also be moved, although this can hardly be done lightly, and this subject also deserves some attention in future comparative studies. Now we will have a few words to say about the movers.

### *The Categorical Distinction and the Role of the Terton*

There are other remarkable things that should be observed from the evidence. One is that the Tibetan terms for 'relic', specifically *ring-bsrel* and *gdung*, have both a broad and a narrow meaning. In their broad meaning, they include more than one ordinary understanding of the word 'relic':

- 1) They include mantras, *dhâraṇî*, scriptures, and commentaries on scriptures; even the central pole of the chorten in view of the fact that it is always inscribed with *dhâraṇî*.
- 2) They include images:
  - A) Molded images of clay which is often mixed with remains of saintly bodies, clothing, etc. Called *tsha-tsha*, these images may be of small chortens, Buddhas, deities, saints, etc.

- B) Wood, stone, metal (etc.) images which, of course, may also contain saintly relics and/or *dhâraṇī*.
- C) Images (chortens, letters, etc.) formed on or from the remains. These are often formed of the same material as the objects in 4, below.
- 3) Although a somewhat distinct category, consecrated articles (*dam-rdzas*). This means especially consecrated pellets which sometimes include the following or other types of relics. Consecrated articles are not in themselves *ring-bsrel* (or *gdung*), but both together belong to the broad category of *byin-nten*.
- 4) They include *ring-bsrel* and *gdung* in the narrow sense, the so-called 'mustard seed like relics', or 'increasing bone'.

Ultimately we intend to focus on the fourth category, but first a few comments on the language problem with regard to the first two. These items are not 'relics' in our sense of the word, but it might be suggested that our failure to comprehend the fact that in *Tibet* they are included in the same classification with bones, teeth, hair, clothing, etc., of the saints has led to huge cultural misunderstandings in the works of outside scholars. Intractable differences in cultural values may underlie simple differences in categorization.

My case-in-point is the Rediscoverer of Hidden Treasure (Terma/*Gter-ma*), the Terton (*Gter-ston*/*Gter-bton*). This issue alone could be grounds for a book,<sup>14</sup> so we will limit ourselves to little more than a hypothesis, since full substantiation would require a huge collection of evidence. Why was the Terton such a controversial figure? Was it because he, and (even if less frequently) she, dug up literary works of more-or-less questionable religious authority?

"Yes" and "No." "Yes," because we may easily question the authenticity of the Termas. "No," because that is not all there is to it. There were reasons why their authenticity was in question, reasons that may be more 'social' than 'theological'. If we use the term 'popular religion' to mean religious practices with significant social impact which arise from a broadly based popular appeal, and, at least in point of origin, are somewhat divorced from, if not at odds with, the established religious authorities, then 'popular religion' must mean above all the cults of saints (the cults of holy persons), the cults of relics (the cults of holy things) and pilgrimage (the cults of holy places). My hypothesis is that the Terton filled three important roles in the religious culture of Tibet: 1) Saint. 2)



Translator of relics. 3) Pilgrimage leader, or, to keep within a Tibetan terminological framework, opener of Hidden Countries (Sbas Yul). These Hidden Countries may be understood as 'rediscovered pilgrimage sites' although, in practice, the Terton frequently became a 'translator' of populations, leading at times thousands of people on revelation-inspired migration-pilgrimages to previously unsettled 'promised' ('prophecied', to be more exact) lands.<sup>15</sup>

The key to this reassessment of the Terton lies in the fact that the books they rediscovered were not, perhaps contrary to our cultural expectations, viewed primarily as literary works to grace library shelves, or even as rare 'first editions'. They were above all relics, either as objects owned by ancient sages or manuscripts written by their own hands. These books, as may be seen in a few instances in the chorten Guides summarized below, could be inserted into images or chortens prior to consecrations.<sup>16</sup> It is surely not by chance that a large number of the Tertons' finds were made in images, chortens, and temples;<sup>17</sup> and usually together with all the other items Tibetans have called relics (*ring-bsrel*), consecrated articles (*dam-rdzas*), and images. To give just one of countless possible examples, when Ratna-gling-pa was about thirty-five years old (in 1438), he made the following rediscoveries together with several volumes of precepts and ritual propitiations at Dge-ri<sup>18</sup> Brag-dmar.

Brahmin Flesh Pellets. Red and white reproductive substances. Elixir Pellets and [Long] Life Pellets. 'Increasing bone' from the heart of Pra-chen Ha-ti.<sup>19</sup> 'Increasing bone' from the tooth of O-rgyan-chen-po [= Padmasambhava]. Hair and 'increasing bone' which came from the dried nasal blood (*shangs mtshal*, 'nose vermilion') of the Lady Mtsho-rgyal [the Tibetan wife of Padmasambhava]. Clothing and other articles belonging to the Guru [= Padmasambhava].<sup>20</sup>

We would not make the claim that the Tertons are *entirely* explainable as relic/pilgrimage entrepreneurs, only that this side of their character has been glossed over in the past. We feel confident that something close to this general picture of the Tertons' role will emerge more clearly when detailed studies on the full-length biographies of major Tertons such as are available for Ratna-gling-pa and Padma-gling-pa<sup>21</sup> have been done. Meanwhile, we turn to the problem of an item which, we will agree, is certainly a 'relic'

in every sense of the word, but of which Euro-American cultural history has no experience. These are the ‘pearls’.

*The ‘Pearls’ as Sign of Saintly Death and Relic Par Excellence*

We turn to the Nyingma tantra, the *Sku-gdung* ‘*Bar-ba*’ (‘Blazing Remains’).<sup>22</sup> It belongs to the highest of three classes within the highest of the Nine Vehicles of the Nyingma school—the Precepts Class (Man-ngag Sde) of the Ati-yoga Vehicle. It is one of the principal seventeen tantras of the Precepts Class. It is written in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha Vajradhâra and the Skygoer (*Mkha’-’gro-ma*) named Clear mind (Gsal Yid).

In chapter one, Clear Mind asks Vajradhâra about the signs of sainthood. Vajradhâra describes, in response, various physical marks which signify spiritual cultivation in previous lives, such as the mark of a conch on the shoulder, etc., symbols of the Body, Speech and Mind of the Buddha. In chapter two, various abilities signifying previous cultivation are described: the ability to remain unharmed in fire, to walk without sinking in the water, to walk without touching the ground; to travel in the sky, crossing the continent of Jambudvîpa at six hundred leagues a moment like wind, to pass through mountains and rocks, etc. Then there are signs experienced by highly developed yogis as preludes to the complete dissolution of the physical body into rainbow colored radiations.<sup>23</sup>

These signs, the special marks on the body in chapter one, and the miracles of chapter two, may be understood respectively as those signs of sainthood which emerge at birth and those that accompany a saintly life. The third chapter, predictably, treats the signs of saintly death<sup>24</sup> which are:

- 1) *Images* left behind after cremation. Images of both peaceful and wrathful deities. These signify that the saint is to attain liberation in the after-death state.<sup>25</sup>
- 2) ‘Bone’ (*gdung*). These are of five types:
  - A) *Sha-ri-ram* (Tathâgata type/center) are white, bright and transparent, forming in the fat. About the size of a pea, they develop from the bone marrow.
  - B) *Ba-ri-ram* (Vajra type/east) are blue-green and darkish. About the size of a mustard seed or small pea, they are formed from the essence of (digestive?) heat, emerging from the interstices of the ribs.

- C) *Chu-ri-ram* (Ratna type/south) are yellow colored. They are about the size of a mustard seed, forming in the blood, appearing on top of the liver.
- D) *Bse-ri-ram* (Padma type/west) are bright and red. Size is about that of a mustard seed. It forms from a combination of the elements, comes from the kidneys.
- E) *Nya-ri-ram* (Karma type/north). Sapphire blue, about the size of a mustard seed, formed from the essence of knowledges, it occurs on the lungs.<sup>26</sup>

All five of these are generally formed in spherical shapes and transparent. *Ring-bsrel* are similar to these, only smaller, the size of sesame seeds or dust, and they may be destroyed by the elements, whereas *gdung* are indestructible. *Ring-bsrel* may come from the head, from the backbone or other joints, or from the skin and flesh.

3) *Lights* are of three types:

- A) Those that encircle the area around the corpse or the house in which it lies.
- B) Lights going up vertically.
- C) Lights shining from the ribs of the corpse.
- 4) Mysterious *sounds* coming from the different directions surrounding the corpse.
- 5) *Earth tremors* signifying different degrees of spiritual attainment depending on the number of days which elapsed since the death.
- 6) *Atmospheric phenomenon*. Rain, storms, hail, wind, mist, fog, rings around the moon, etc.

This third and final chapter ends as the audience expresses its appreciation for the answers given by Vajradhâra as, so to speak, the curtain falls. The work was translated and verified by the Indian Master Vimalamitra and the Tibetan translator Ka-ba Dpal-brtsegs.

The first category of signs, the images left behind after cremation, is known from a testimonial by a modern Mongolian Buddhist leader, speaking about things he observed in about 1923. *Sharil* is a Mongolian loan from Sanskrit (*śarīra*) with the broad and narrow meanings of the Tibetan *ring-bsrel*.

... when I was nine or ten years old and still residing at Serku Monastery in the Amdo region, I had a friend Monon Serku *gegen*, two years older than I. When he died and was cremated, I observed that his *sharil* (Skt. *śarīra*; a jewel-like deposit remaining after the cremation) was in the shape of an image of Yamdagha (Skt. Yamântaka), “Conqueror of Yama,” the supreme deity of hell and the protector of the Buddha’s Law. This phenomenon greatly astonished me, and I bowed in veneration to it. On another similar occasion, after the cremation of a venerable lama, I beheld that on the skull of his remains were imprinted three images of the Buddha. Manjushri (Skt. Mañjuśrî; Ch. Wen-shu *p’u-sa*) was situated in the middle, with Ariyabul

(the thousand handed Kuan-yin *p'u-sa* or Avalokiteśvara) on one side, and Ochirbani (Skt. Vajrapāṇi; Ch. P'u-hsien *p'u-sa*) on the other. This would have been difficult for me to believe had I not seen it with my own eyes. To this day I still marvel at this miraculous occurrence.<sup>27</sup>

We have noticed some similar phenomena in the chorten Guides by Kong-sprul and Lha-btsun, both of which, we should point out, mention skulls with the Tibetan letter 'A' naturally formed on them.<sup>28</sup> We may see that these 'images' have been formed either directly out of the bone or from the substance now to be described.

The second category of signs, the *gdung* and *ring-bsrel* (= ringsel) are described by a contemporary western Buddhist and former nun based, in part, on her own observations.

Ringsel are small spherical relics, usually white, though sometimes manifesting the five colors, which emerge from the ashes of great teachers after their death or from sacred places such as Buddha statues or stūpas. It is said that they are brought forth by the devotion of the disciples, and that even when a very advanced practitioner dies, if there are no devoted disciples, there will be no ringsel. There are also cases of ringsel appearing after the ashes or bits of bones have been collected and kept for some time. Someone might have some remnants and keep them very devotedly and carefully, and after some time, look at them and they may have turned into ringsel. Ringsel also have the ability to reproduce. One of them gets bigger and bumps appear on the side and then the bumps become small ringsel. In 1970 the stūpa of Swayambhu in Kathmandu produced ringsel on the eastern side of the stūpa. There were thousands all over the ground and all the monastery, including the highest lama, who almost never left his room, were outside picking them up.<sup>29</sup>

I fully realize that there will be some readers who will take the position that this source is too 'New Age' and therefore not admissible as evidence in the higher courts of academia. Against this somewhat condescending attitude, we present the following unimpeachably Tibetan testimony drawn from the memoirs of Rdo-ring Paṇḍi-ta. The circumstances surrounding this testimony hold their own fascination, but this story has already been summarized in English.<sup>30</sup> We will say only by way of introduction that Rdo-ring Paṇḍi-ta and the other Tibetan officials mentioned here were under official arrest by the Nepalese government at the time the following event took place (in about June 1792). This is all part of the very complex chain of events that developed in the course of Tibetan-Nepalese hostilities.

Then, on the full moon holiday of Saga Dawa, ‘three holidays in one’,<sup>31</sup> I together with the Minister (Bka’-blon) G.yu-thog, Snya’-nang Sho-pa, Rgyal-rtse Sne-stod-pa, Bkras-lhun Thang-smad Nor-dbang, and the Sakya Secretary, all the nobles and servants together, were doing prostrations, circumambulations, and aspiration prayers at the great chorten Bya-rung-kha-shor (Bodhanath).<sup>32</sup> First I alone found a piece of ‘increasing bone’ (*phel-gdung*) about the size of a ‘fish eye’<sup>33</sup> on the circumambulation path on the east side of the great chorten. After that I and all the others started looking for them. There were then to be gathered various sizes of increasing bone, *sha-ri-ram*, ‘fish eyes’ and so forth on top of the stepped levels (*bang-rim*) beneath the ‘vessel’ (*bum-pa*), and on the circumambulation path. A few times some of them fell down from the thirteen disks (‘Dharma wheels’) of the spire and from the vessel part at the center of the chorten proper with a plunking sound, and people saw this with their own eyes. We told the village people and monks from the Red Hat Lama’s monastery that they should get some quickly, but not so many were found. In all there were about thirty of these ‘increasing bone’ which we obtained as supports of our faith, and they remain in our possession even now.

On the next and following days, we as well as others searched for them daily, but despite our efforts not a single one was found. This was quite clearly a miracle for confirming our faith and for producing great blessings.<sup>34</sup>

There are countless similar testimonies to be found in Tibetan literature on *ring-bsrel* emerging from a variety of objects. Here are a few instances from the biography of the famous Sakya scholar Rong-ston Shes-bya-kun-rig (1367-1450?) which was written in 1474. When some time had passed after Rong-ston’s death, the big toenail of his right foot was found to have entirely transformed into a substance like mother of pearl. Another person had procured a tooth of the saint which later turned into a substance with the appearance of amber, and it gave birth to hundreds of *ring-bsrel* which finally filled up its container. Still another person received a tooth which immediately produced a *ring-bsrel*. Later, a single *ring-bsrel* appeared on the same spot, and after it fell another appeared there.<sup>35</sup>

The following example is quite intriguing for the fact that it comes from an interesting episode in Buddhist history that is always ignored in the general surveys. In the late thirteenth century, in Tabriz (in the extreme northwest of Persia, and just to the west of the south end of the Caspian Sea), the Mongol ruler Arghun was a great supporter of both Buddhism and Buddhist monks. The following took place in April of 1288 A.D.

Buka’s envoys brought back with them to Persia one of the relics so much esteemed among the Buddhists, called Sharil. These are hard pieces of a

substance which is said to be found in the ashes of some saintly persons when cremated. Von Hammer says that Buddha's heart was supposed to be made of bone and not of flesh, similarly with the hearts of great men, and that the sharil is really held to be the ossified heart of the cremated person. Arghun, we are told, treated this relic with the greatest honour, gold was strewn over it, while a feast was duly celebrated.<sup>36</sup>

The naturally formed images and 'pearls' or 'increasing bone' (*'phel-gdung*) have some things in common. They both may come from cremated bodies.<sup>37</sup> But the 'pearl' phenomenon is not limited to a cremation context. 'Pearls' are also produced by living persons, from their skin and particularly their hair. Sometimes they are said to form from blood. They may, as in Kong-sprul's Guide, be found on a tooth. They can come out of chortens or images. Another thing the images and 'pearls' share is that both belong to two otherwise distinct conceptual categories in religious life. They both tend to belong equally to the category of relics and the category of 'signs of saintly death'. We would argue that it is precisely this intersection of categories that lends the 'pearls' their unique place in the Tibetan cult of relics. Add to this their smallness and relative availability to individual believers; their insertion into images and chortens where, like other relics, they would normally be wrapped and labelled to preserve knowledge of the saint who produced them;<sup>38</sup> and their use as a kind of death-bed sacrament.<sup>39</sup> All this amounts to a fairly large cultural weight for what is, in actuality, a very small globe-shaped mass of tiny crystals which I have personally handled and observed, to all appearances in the process of growing out of both hairs and bones. They are said to be continually produced long after the cremation in the case of bones and after cutting in the case of hair. There are several possible naturalistic explanations which we will not explore here, concerned as we are with the classical Tibetan view in which they might be either miraculous or fraudulent.

### *Disputing Relics*

Fraudulent? Tibet, too, has had its skeptics. We have an early and detailed criticism of 'popular religion'<sup>40</sup> penned by the founding father of Tibetan scholastic method, Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta Kunga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182-1251).<sup>41</sup> He was the proponent, perhaps

the most prominent Tibetan proponent, of a Buddhism squarely based on both textual authority (scriptures) and reason. His work called *The Classifications of the Three [Types of Buddhist] Vows* takes an especially hard line against those who advocate instant or 'singly caused' Enlightenment (what he calls *dkar-po gcig-thub*), including those who make such extraordinary claims as, 'circumambulating a chorten once is sufficient.'<sup>42</sup> His criticism of popular religion (cults of holy places included) is found in a context which underscores his strong, even passionate, concern for philological propriety in religion. Just preceding the passage which is translated below is found a discussion on various scriptures then extant in Tibet which he considered apocryphal or otherwise unreliable; while immediately following are discussions of various Indian Buddhist terms which were, according to him, either wrongly rendered by Tibetan translators or wrongly etymologized by Tibetan scholars. Sa-skyia Paṇḍi-ta may be a 'skeptic' in this passage, but he is not questioning the possibility or actual occurrence of these amazing phenomenon so much as he is questioning their etiology and significance according to *popular* ('foolish' or 'childish', to use his own words) interpretations.

The reasons why *ring-bsrel*, hearts and tongues,<sup>43</sup> images<sup>44</sup> and so forth emerge from the remains of cremated saints needs to be investigated a little. The *ring-bsrel* of the three types of saints emerge through the force of their saintly qualities. As receptacles for the merit of embodied beings,<sup>45</sup> these emerge [genuinely] like jewels from a [definite] origin.<sup>46</sup> Some *ring-bsrel* are made by malicious *gdon* spirits. Others emerge [naturally] from the four elements. There are, as well, some which are brought into being as faith producing manifestations by deities who delight in the Buddha's teachings. But nowadays the majority of *ring-bsrel* are deceitfully manufactured.<sup>47</sup> Hence, the distinctions between these types must be examined by the wise [the scholars].

The emerging of hearts, tongues, images and so forth is not preached in Buddhist scripture.<sup>48</sup> Still, generally speaking, all these things are deceitfully manufactured. Even if they were genuine, there is no scriptural authority or rational method for distinguishing genuine from manufactured, hence the difficulty of establishing whether or not they are positive signs.

The dawning of several suns, the approximation of windows in space, rainbows at night, lights radiating from a corpse, sudden visions of deities and spirits, the nondeceitful dripping of *ring-bsrel* from a living person's body...<sup>49</sup> Such things the foolish may take for positive signs, but if wise persons saw such things, they would know them to be signs of impediments.<sup>50</sup> While the foolish may be amazed at images crying, walking, dancing, or uttering words; at showers of blood, sound of donkeys braying beneath the ground, animals speaking human tongues, and so on,<sup>51</sup> if wise persons perceive such



things, they know that enemies are invading the country, or that other calamities are headed their way. When people perceive things of this nature, they would do well to consult the wise.

These are just a few examples of common misinterpretations.<sup>52</sup>

Although it may seem a bit of an irony, the death and cremation of Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta himself was accompanied, according to his biographers, by various miraculous signs, including those same ‘images’ which he had averred were not taught in Buddhist scripture. In the version of his life according to the *Sa-skya’i Gdung-rabs* by Kun-dga’-bsod-nams, completed in 1509 A.D., the signs at his death included banners of victory, instrumental and vocal music, and earth tremors. When his body was cremated, the smoke made rainbows and there were sounds of instrumental music which everyone present heard. His remains for the most part turned into all sorts of naturally produced divine images and *ring-bsrel*.<sup>53</sup> Kun-dga’-bsod-nams now cites a previous biography by one Yar-lung-pa Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan:

On the middle of his ‘crown protuberance’ there occurred distinct and perfect images of Hevajra and Mañjuḥṣa. In the area of the forehead bone was the [deity] assemblage of Cakrasamvara. On a piece of his collarbone was the Buddha Bhagavan. On his shoulder bone was a Khasarpāṇi. In the hollow of his foot was an Avalokiteśvara. On sections of his backbone were the four ‘secret mothers’ (*gsang-ba’i yum*, i.e., consorts). On his knee bones were Tārā and Acala. On the fingers of his right hand were images of Maitreya with the gesture of turning the Wheel of Dharma [seated] above a *nāga* tree. These ten [just listed] occurred as Body receptacles. The melodious speech of Brahma—lion’s roar of Voidness—the letter ‘A’, symbol of nonorigination, appeared in relief [this being the Speech receptacle]. Above his two ears were two Namgyal chortens. [There was] a Samaya [instrument] Vajra marked in the center with [the syllable] Hūṃ. His pure thoughts and intentions emerged as self-produced Dharmakāya [the Mind receptacle]. Besides these, an incalculable number of various sorts of *ring-bsrel* occurred.<sup>54</sup>

As this quote makes clear, Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta’s failure to find scriptural authority for ‘images’ did not put a stop to them, and this fact was not missed by later critics.

One of the few persons in Tibetan history who argued against the views expressed by Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta, but especially against his later commentators, was Mkhas-dbang Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje (1569-1645), a scholar of the Drukpa Kargyudpa school. In one of his polemical works, most of them aimed at Mang-thos Klu-sgrub-



rgya-mtsho (1523-1596) and his students, he comments on Sa Paṇ's passage on relics. The general work<sup>55</sup> is mainly given to the subject of holy places, especially those two places in Tibet which were most sacred to the Kargyudpa—Mount Kailash in western Tibet and Tsari in the Assam borderlands in the east.<sup>56</sup> Both were believed to be identical to holy places mentioned in the *Cakrasamvara* and other tantras, a belief to which Sa Paṇ, needless to say, did not subscribe.<sup>57</sup> Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje discusses a few lines at a time, and since it would not suit our purposes to reproduce the statements of Sa Paṇ once more, the following is meant to convey the substance of his critical response. Direct translations are enclosed in double quote marks, the remainder being paraphrased.<sup>58</sup>

When Sa Paṇ says that the *ring-bsrel* of saints emerge through force of their saintly qualities, Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje responds, "True." To the statements on their being produced by malicious spirits, the four elements or deities, the answer is, "Half-true." When Sa Paṇ says that most *ring-bsrel* nowadays are deceitfully manufactured and that they must be distinguished by scholars, Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje cries "Foul!"

"Of course, if the scholars honestly look into the problem, they will know," Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje says, "but even we confused 'fools' can figure it out if we look into it." But what Sa Paṇ is really doing here is casting aspersions on the many stories of variously colored *ring-bsrel* which occurred as signs of the spiritual accomplishments of the past Kargyudpa masters. What he is really saying here when he says, "Nowadays the majority of *ring-bsrel* are deceitfully manufactured," is this: 'If these supports of worship occur in my case, they are not to be included.' We could just as well argue that these *ring-bsrel* [of Sa Paṇ], even if not deceitfully manufactured, might belong to the other classes of those made by malicious spirits, the four elements, or deities.

"There have indeed been those few who take *gangs-thig* ('snowdrop' stone), pearls, etc. wrap them in cloth and place them in a reliquary box announcing that these are *ring-bsrel*. These people shouldn't just be scolded, when even fists would be appropriate."

On the statements about hearts, tongues and 'images' not being taught in Buddhist scriptures, he responds by citing the passage which we have just translated on the images that occurred on the bones of Sa Paṇ himself. An empiricist, he pits the weight of repeated observation against Sa Paṇ's scripture-based rationalism:

"All sorts of divine images, letters, deity insignia (*phyag-mtshan*) and 'increasing bone' composed of small bones, resinous exudations, ashes and stones from the funerary pyres have adhered to the remains of many of the masters of India and Tibet. Both talk about these as well as the articles themselves have formed objective spheres of the sense organs." He makes an

example of the relics of Rgya-ras-pa. “The great intellectuals have trouble knowing what to make of such reports. [Sa Paṅ] added these misleading verses which make the contrary [opinion] more obvious and without at all thinking, involves himself in a mass of contradictions. Is he saying about these divine images, which were not preached in Buddhist scriptures, but which have nevertheless been engendered from the remains of our lamas, that they are all deceitfully manufactured? Even if we took such a possibility for a fact, since there is no scriptural authority or rational method to decide one way or the other, we could not pretend to establish their goodness or say that they are bad. Knowing this, we must count these ways that Body, Speech and Mind receptacles occur as being among the great miracles. Therefore, to assert that they are all false is like a deer chasing a mirage. It [the argument] will lead to nothing but exhaustion.

“The *Blazing Remains Tantra*, which is counted among the Old Translations, explains how hearts, tongues and images as well as entire heads emerge whole [from the cremation fire]. If true, how could he write that they are not taught in Buddhist scripture? And if he did not accept this tantra as a valid scripture, he should have in the first place critically examined it. Therefore people’s arguments about the goodness or badness [of these signs] are in broad terms only [arguments about] existence or nonexistence, and they thereby commit one of the ‘four extremes’ [to be avoided in Buddhist philosophy].”<sup>59</sup>

Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje goes on to discuss the other miracles mentioned by Sa Paṅ. Going back to the scriptural sources on the crying, walking, dancing and talking images, Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje finds that those sources are talking specifically about images of ‘wordly deities’ (deities who assist or hinder worldly goals rather than aiding toward the ultimate goal of Enlightenment). Consecrated images of transworldly deities [to the contrary] perform such actions as part of the Emanation Body deeds of Buddhas, in order to aid and encourage people in their quest for Enlightenment. About the other miraculous occurrences, Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje says that they are, after all is said and done, *miracles*, and as such they are naturally difficult things to explain even if one *does* ask the scholars about them.

While the former arguments were part of a larger debate between the Sakyapa and Kargyudpa sects, the following is from a debate between the Sakyapa (?) ’Bri-gung Dpal-’dzin, and a Nyingma apologist, Sog-bzlog-pa. The argument on the nature of ‘signs of saintly death’ takes a slightly different twist. Dpal-’dzin (as cited by Sog-bzlog-pa) wrote in his circular entitled ‘How to Distinguish What Is and Is Not Dharma’ [*Chos dang Chos-ma-yin-pa Rnam-par Dbye-ba’i Rab-tu Byed-pa*]:

Some say that the adherents of Great Perfection are Buddhist (Chos) because of good signs at their funerals. These good funeral signs to which they refer have their textual authority in what sūtra or tantra? When the Completely Perfect Buddha[s], the Arhats and other saints died it is said that there were *bad* omens such as earthquakes, a nearby fire (? *phyogs tshig*), shooting stars and winds. When great personages such as these pass away, it means the merit of creatures is used up. Therefore it is right that such [bad omens] as these should occur. When one has been reborn in the divine realms [i.e., *not* a saint!] flowers fall. Images, letters, hearts, tongues and eyes do not occur [in the case of] saints. Images, letters, hearts and tongues do occur [in the case of] Bonpos who despise Chos.<sup>60</sup>

The reply of Sog-bzlog-pa:

“The relics (*ring-bsrel*) of the three [types of] saints emerge through the strength of their [saintly] qualities.” This backing by the scriptural authority of the sūtras is sufficient [in the case of *ring-bsrel*]. The occurrence of images and letters is [however] one of the things that sets tantras apart from sūtras.

The Reverend Lord [Atiśa] said, “Deity images occur to those who have [mastered] the Generation Stage. For those of pure conduct there are rainings of flowers. For Bodhicitta, *ring-bsrel* drip out. To show the actual meaning of the external and internal sensory potentialities (*skye-mched/āyatana*), the letter ‘A’ [occurs]. For Nonreturners (Phyir-mi-ldog-pa/Anāgāmin), a spiraling conch [occurs]. In the case of [Bodhi]sattvas who have not abandoned *samsāra*, hearts and tongues occur.” This and more may be found explained in the [*Bka’-gdams*] *Glegs-bam*<sup>61</sup> itself.

It may well be that when great personages pass away, bad signs occur because the merit of creatures is used up. But also receptacles of Body, Speech and Mind occur for the multiplying of their own liberated saintly qualities as well as of the merit of those whom they are meant to help. The Reverend Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta had a Hevajra [image] in the middle of his *uṣṇiṣa*, a Khasarpāṇi on his shoulder along with a great many other deity images. The Lord of Beings, Gtsang-pa Rgya-ras-pa had twenty-one images of Avalokiteśvara on twenty-one sections of his backbone. The learned Gung-ru<sup>62</sup> had the long *Aṣṭa* mantra in raised relief on his skull. There have been an unimaginable number of spiritual teachers who had: the letter ‘A’ showing the actual meaning of the external and internal sensory potentialities; the *Om Aḥ* and *Hūṃ* which are supports of Body, Speech and Mind; the six syllables (*Om Maṇi-padme Hūṃ*) and so forth. One may know by looking at their individual biographies how many of the great personages of the past [had such signs] including the peerless doctor from Dwags-po (Sgam-po-pa) who had heart and tongue [unburnt]. Well now, how can you [Dpal’dzin] not think that these are good [signs]?<sup>63</sup>

One main point that emerges from these polemical statements is that Tibetan thinkers have not been unanimous in their views about the significance of relics and signs of saintly death. Neither were they unanimous about the ‘authority’ of scriptures and other writings (such as saintly biographies). Charges of fraudulence were

mainly exchanged along sectarian lines as footnotes to larger disagreements. The scripture-based rationalist can accept only miracles with their source in scripture, while the empiricist can say little in reply except that these things happen, with or without direct scriptural justification. We might argue together with the empiricist position that nuclear explosions have happened, even if there is no direct scriptural passage which could ‘prove’ them. On another hand, the arguments might lead us to reflect on some sober issues of religious studies—How much is the actual practice of a religion prescribed by its scriptures? What aspects of religious culture might be missed by comparative religionists who insist on limiting themselves to the study of scriptures? What do we gain by giving this one word ‘scripture’ to religious books which might mean different things to different people, even within a single religion or tradition? Students of religious culture might naturally feel more affinity with the Tibetan empiricists on this issue while, no doubt, the learned philologists, with their concern for textual propriety similar to that of Sa Paṇ, will find this discussion slightly unsettling. Now we will look at another work that some Tibetan Buddhists would treat as ‘scripture’ while others would not.

### *Making Relics*

There is a text from the collected rediscoveries of the Terton Padma-gling-pa<sup>64</sup> which, we are given to believe, came from the hand of Dga’-rab-rdo-rje, the founder of the Nyingma Ati-yoga lineages, giving directions on how to produce *ring-bsrel*. It is, in several ways, an exasperating text which I will summarize as well as I am able. First, it tells the importance of realizing the first two of the ‘four appearances’ (*snang bzhi*)<sup>65</sup> according to the Crossover (*Thod-rgal*) teachings of the Precepts Class of Ati-yoga in order to bring about the transformations in the body which will produce *ring-bsrel* for the sake of the faithful. Then a *sādhana* description begins. It requires the use of a skull in which five mantras and five drawings are to be inscribed with an ink composed of herbal essences and liquid gold. Inside the skull (or skulls) is to be placed [a?] *ring-bsrel* of a Sugata (Buddha or saint) or at least one that is definitely from a Siddha (yoga practitioner with magical powers).

The Five Good Medicinal Herbs<sup>66</sup> are wrapped in pieces of cloth and arranged upon the five inscribed mantras. Basic rituals are prescribed, and a mantra given which is to be recited through a seven day retreat.

When good results are achieved, attach the *ring-bsrel* to your arm-pit without anyone seeing you. Then, either for yourself or someone else, when it is time to die and the signs of death are complete, take those same *ring-bsrel* and, thinking they are the essence of all Tathâgatas, put them in the throat. When the body is cremated, there will be a stack of *ring-bsrel*. If you want images, take a naturally occurring image and do as above; place them in the throat, and so they will emerge at cremation. Keep these deeds secret. If someone sees or hears these things, bad people will make exaggerated talk and those with wrong views will increase their accumulation of sin. This being secret mantra, do it in secret. This was written by Dga'-rab-rdo-rje for the sake of increasing the Buddha's teaching, hidden by Padmasambhava, and brought out of the chorten at Samye by Padma-gling-pa.

This work seems to convey an attitude in which certain deceits are approved of for the promotion of faith. Indeed, Padma-gling-pa was one of the most controversial of Tertons, and he often had to defend himself against charges of fraudulence.<sup>67</sup> Which is not to belittle him. His autobiography is, for instance, one of the most extraordinary and colorful pieces of Tibetan (and Bhutanese) literature. If read carefully, this text on making *ring-bsrel* does not make all *ring-bsrel* out to be purposefully manufactured in order to induce faith in the faithful; in fact, the process of making them requires the use of a genuine *ring-bsrel* (or image), the multiplication of which does not seem to be explained by the ingredients used. We have what looks like a clear case of using a miracle to produce a miracle.

An earlier Tibetan text, written in about 1170 to 1190 by Zhang G.yu-brag-pa Brtson-'grus-grags-pa (1123-1193) also tells a way of 'making' *ring-bsrel* (here called *sha-ri-ram*), but in a very devotional context. The text we are about to cite is one of a set of seven texts with the collective title 'Seven Expedients [for Developing Devotion toward] the Lama' (Bla-ma'i Lam-khyer Bdun). Before citing in his support an otherwise unknown tantra,<sup>68</sup> he says,

Yogis, when their Lama has passed away, [should] take his powdered bones (*gdung-rus-kyi phye-ma*), place a syllable Hûm made of gold in the middle, and attach this to the neck or at the top of the head. Worshipping and making prayers at intervals, when they have purity of intent toward the result that they desire, in seven years the bones (*gdung*) will increase (*'phel-ba*) into an incalculable [number of] *sha-ri-ram*.

A late nineteenth century medical missionary in Mongolia, the Reverend James Gilmour, including *ring-bsrel* in his list of frauds consciously perpetrated by lamas. Of course, as a missionary, he had reasons of his own for making such charges:

When famous lamas die and their bodies are burnt, little white pills are reported as found among the ashes, and sold for large sums to the devout, as being the concentrated virtue of the man, and possessing the power of insuring a happy future for him who swallows one near death. This is quite common. I heard of one man who improved on this, by giving out that these pills were in the habit of coming out through the skin of various parts of the body. These pills called *sharil*, met with a ready sale, and then the man himself reaped the reward of his virtue, and did not allow all the profit of it to go to his heir.<sup>69</sup>

Although we may seem to be stacking the evidence in favour of fraudulence, I personally do not believe that the cynical view is necessarily the correct one. I think of these things rather as anomalies, not yet investigated in any systematic way by natural sciences, but meanwhile their occurrence is perfectly acceptable to my generally rational if somewhat pragmatic way of thinking. Still, I acknowledge that these anomalies ('miracles', if you will) could, due to their popular appeal, encourage imitations or 'reproductions' after the fact.

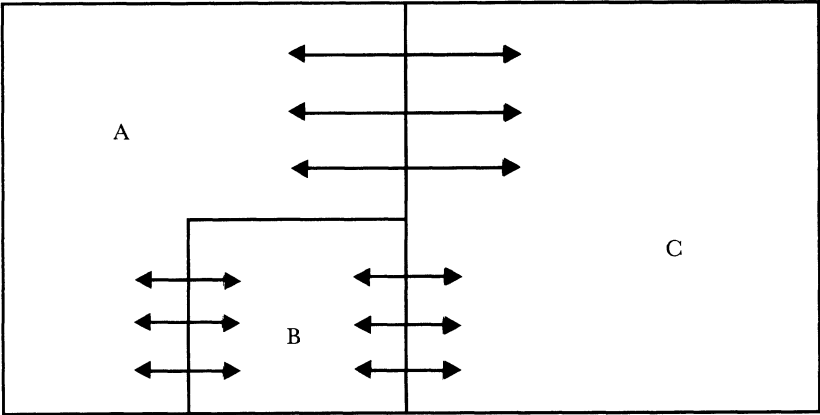
There is at least one other analogous phenomenon in Tibetan religious culture which is not a relic *per se*, but rather a consecrated article. We refer to what is known as the Mani Pellet (Ma-ñi Ril-bu). This Mani Pellet is produced during a religious service, usually lasting several days, the relatively wellknown "Mani Rimdu" (Ma-ñi Ril-bsgrub) of Nepal's Sherpas being one such ritual. Its ingredients, primarily wheat flour, must include, according to one source,<sup>70</sup> both *ring-bsrel* and a Mani Pellet made previously. The 'mother' pellet is capable of giving birth to a number of smaller 'baby' pellets, a phenomenon I have not observed.<sup>71</sup> Unlike *ring-bsrel*, Mani Pellets are non-crystalline, smooth, light or reddish brown and somewhat asymmetrically

spherical. Evidently the ‘baby’ pellets emerge from their ‘mother’ pellets in the same way in which the *ring-bsrel* emerge and ultimately detach themselves from the bone or hair. These pellets are decidedly not reproduced under conditions of extreme heat.

*A Conclusion, or, It May Be Best Not to ‘Conclude’ Too Much*

In summary, a considerable range of cultural phenomena and popular beliefs have crystallized around the cults of relics in Tibet. If we students of Tibetan culture have so far failed to realize any general portraits of this complex of beliefs, objects, and practices, it is, to my mind, not only because we have failed to predict it, but also because we find certain of its manifestations extreme, distasteful, or, so to speak, culturally surprising.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps it is because of our own cultural experience with similar phenomena.

Protestant Christianity in particular has led us toward a view of scripture as the source of all presently available religious inspiration. Except for a few relatively logocentric Tibetan scholars, here represented by Sa-skya Paṇḍita, Tibetan religious life as a whole has recognized scripture as a contingent and integral part of a broad array of sacred items, including temples and chortens, humanly-made as well as ‘natural’ (self-produced) images, and things we would recognize as relics. ‘Relics’ in the Tibetan case is a broader category than our own, often including scriptural texts, images, *tsha-tsha*. Consider the following simple chart for a moment.



The square of A which is inclusive of square B represents the holy things in Tibetan Buddhism. A exclusive of B represents the holy things that are not relics, while B represents relics, and C represent signs of sainthood or what is practically its synonym here, 'miraculous events'. But the category walls that we have charted out in black and white prove to be semipermeable membranes. Mediating between A and B are: 1. Scriptural volumes that are also relics of contact by virtue of belonging to a saint. 2. Scriptural volumes that are bodily relics because bodily relics of saints have been used for the ink, etc. 3. Chortens (and temples) that contain relics of all types. 4. Images and *tsha-tsha* that contain relics of various types. 5. Images that are relics of contact, or images that have been thoroughly identified with saints (such as the excavated 'representatives', *sku-tshab*, or more generally images 'made from life'). 6. Sacramental pellets which may contain some hints of various relics.

Bridging the divide between relics (B) and miraculous events (C) are: 1. *ring-bsrel* or 'increasing bone' (*'phel-gdung*). 2. Images formed on or of bodily relics. 3. Hearts, tongues, and eyes that emerge intact from the cremation fires.

Although less emphasized here, there are bridges between non-relic holy things and miraculous events, such as talking images or images produced 'naturally', signs of sainthood such as imprints of hands and feet in solid rock, and so forth.

Finally, once the visual impact of the chart has done its work, the boundaries may be permitted to dissolve, leaving a single sphere of substantives and verbs standing for the holy substances and occurrences of Tibetan Buddhism. The logical subject of all possible sentences that might be generated from these particular nouns and verbs is, of course, the holy person, the Buddhas and the whole range of other Buddhist saints.

Although there can be no culturally *unbound* way of arguing for or against a culture-bound attitude (and this holds true for 'scientific' attitudes in all their varied, temporary expressions), I would argue that our typical attitudes toward the cults of relics of past and present in our own and other cultures is not due to our lack of cultural relics. We are all collectors of relics of some sort or another. Rather, we have these attitudes because we no longer have any strongly shared popular cults of *saints*.<sup>73</sup>



If saint recognition lies behind these relic-related cultural complexes, then there is, in addition, a third factor behind recognized sainthood. We refer to that inexplicable phenomenon which forms the basis for the shared popular recognition of saints, to those mysteriously diffusing spiritual influences which are the social contributions of these strange, often reclusive and sometimes at least superficially antisocial creatures. These blessings, these ‘gifts’,<sup>74</sup> are the bedrock of all the cultural classifications and practices outlined in this paper. Our failure to recognize their power hampers even our less *matter*-ialistic attempts at social analysis precisely because we do not see what it is that *matters* most in the subject we want to investigate. It requires a basic acknowledgement of this power to render the extreme manifestations, which may be as shocking to the everyday normalities of their home culture as they would be to others, intelligible. It is the living blessing of the saint that touches us when we come in contact with the relic, presuming some measure of openness, of faith. As an anonymous Tibetan author of the thirteenth century said, employing characteristically Tibetan metaphors,

If the white glacier of veneration has not formed,  
from where will the flowing streams of blessings come? <sup>75</sup>

Popular religion, plainly put, has the capacity to widen the margins of our intellectual as well as social outlooks; it strains our credulity as well as our perception of our responsibilities which seem so strongly outlined in our individual ‘social contracts’. It is hinged with imagination, beliefs, practices and sometimes even ‘material’ objects not so well covered by the usual understandings of the situations we find ourselves in. This gives it an important transformational role in the social *and* intellectual spheres, not only in the private religious lives of individual believers.

Although the point is arguable, I would at least advance for the sake of argument that we students of comparative religion have too often looked for the source of the ‘holy’ in abstract concepts and revealed words because of our own personal fondness for abstract concepts and books. We sit embroiled in scholastic wranglings about the nature of the Alâyavijñâna, the Dharmakâya or the Holy Spirit, while Tenzin the yak herder circumambulates the neighborhood chorten telling his beads. Of course, Sonam the

government official and some monks from a nearby monastery are right there behind him. Who understands the ‘holy’ better? We scarcely consider that we may be looking too hard and too far for something Tenzin and Sonam know is right here with us. This seems to be what we are really talking about when we invoke the words ‘popular religion’, or is it perhaps something different from ‘real’ religion? What do historians know about sacred *presence*? In actuality, we share similar ideas about the identity of these particular pearls no matter how far away from them talk and controversy and historical sifting seem to have taken us, but we disagree about the nature of the bones from which they come. At the very least, all this talk about ‘popular religion’ could help lead us toward more self-critical and serious considerations on the identity of the swine before whom they should not be thrown. They, too, may be us, since miracles do tend to dissolve at the touch of those whose worldview finds no place for them.

#### Appendix: Data on Tibetan Relics

##### *Guide to the Sikkimese Chorten Named Sku-'bum Mthong-ba Rang-grol*

This Guide, written by Lha-btsun Nam-mkha’-'jigs-med (1597-1653 A.D.),<sup>76</sup> opens with a eulogy on the area surrounding the chorten, noting such features as a naturally formed clay chorten with drops of elixirial *nāga*-water on it, the mere touching or tasting of which will clear up an aeon’s accumulation of defilements.<sup>77</sup> Surrounding this are four ‘thrones’ blessed by the Guru (Padmasambhava) with hand and foot prints and likenesses of the eight auspicious symbols in relief. The surroundings are like the eight great cemeteries,<sup>78</sup> filled with yogis, spirits, cannibals and animals including leopards, bears and poisonous snakes. Scents of sandalwood and camphor are in the air. The local human and animal inhabitants have few desires, a sense of satisfaction. They have no possessiveness toward their houses and wealth. They have no miserliness, no stinginess.

Several wealthy people built this chorten as prophesied by Padmasambhava in this place which is, in its non-vital aspects,<sup>79</sup> a divine palace, its ‘vital’ inhabitants constituting a mandala of divinities. Its building was accompanied by dream signs as well as

external signs: letters of the alphabet falling from the sky in a dream consecration, a rainfall during the actual consecration ceremony, etc.

Now the chorten itself is described. The contents are listed below under the categories employed by the text itself:

1) Tantric *dhâraṇī*:<sup>80</sup> In the uppermost tip, the Btags-grol Mthong-grol of Ati-yoga Tantra<sup>81</sup> and the five great *dhâraṇī* including that of Uṣṇîṣa[vijâya].<sup>82</sup> In the base of the *harmikâ* ('bre'), *dhâraṇī* of the deities of Mahâ-, Anu-, and Ati-yogas...<sup>83</sup>

2) The insertion of scriptures and relics (*ring-bsrel*): 'Increasing bone' (*'phel-gdung*) of Śâkyamuni Buddha. In the base of the spire, a tooth of Śâriputra<sup>84</sup> and bones of Sangs-rgyas-gling-pa.<sup>85</sup> In the bulge of the 'vessel' (*bum-pa/kum-bha*):<sup>86</sup> 'increasing bone' from the White Chorten at Samye (Bsam-yas)<sup>87</sup> as well as from Rgyal-rtse<sup>88</sup> and Rtse-la-sgang.<sup>89</sup> Chu-ri-ram<sup>90</sup> 'increasing bone' of the Buddha... Miraculous relics of Dga'-rab-rdo-rje.<sup>91</sup> The forearm of Rgyal-ba-mchog-dbyangs<sup>92</sup> and bones of nine other Nyingma historical figures of the eighth century (listed).

3) Consecrated substances (*dam-rdzas*) and blessing bestowing objects of worship (*rien byin-brlabs-can*, = *byin-rten*):

A jewel blessed by Buddha Kâśyapa,<sup>93</sup> brought by Nâgârjuna from the *nâga* land, concealed by Padmasambhava at Turquoise Lake in Tsari,<sup>94</sup> and rediscovered by Ye-shes-rdo-rje.<sup>95</sup> Images of the Buddhas of the five types (*rigs*, 'families'). A reddish bronze Buddha image. A fine, large image of Maitreya made of golden bronze... A testicle (*a-ril*) rediscovered by 'Ja'-tshon-snying-po<sup>96</sup> at Kong-phrang-brag. The red and white Bodhicitta (in this context, "reproductive substances") of Padmasambhava and his consort rediscovered at Lha-ri Sngang-mtha'. Hair of Padmasambhava. Hair of Tibetan emperors. A testicle rediscovered at Bsam-yas Mchims-phu. A testicle rediscovered from behind the Jowo (Jo-bo) image at Lhasa.<sup>97</sup> Clothing, hair, testicle[s], etc., of Padmasambhava rediscovered by Sangs-rgyas-gling-pa<sup>98</sup> along with an assortment of consecrated articles and manuscript pages rediscovered by the various Rediscoverers (Terton, *gter-ston*, discussed above). Relics and consecrated articles from Kargyudpa saints. Elixir Pellets (*bdud-rtsi ril-bu*).<sup>99</sup> A tooth of 'Brug-smyon Kun-legs.<sup>100</sup> More hair relics. A skull of Khyung-po Ras-chen with a naturally formed letter 'A' on it along with his forearm with a natural image of Amitâyus. Special earths and stones from India, Tibet and China. Brahmin flesh rediscovered by O-rgyan-gling-pa (b. 1323) and the same rediscovered by Rdor-'bum-chos-grags and Sangs-rgyas-bla-ma.<sup>101</sup> Flesh of Ratna-gling-pa.<sup>102</sup> Loincloths (*ang-rag*) of Gtsang-smyon and of Dbus-smyon.<sup>103</sup> The sitting cushion and loincloth of Tilopa.<sup>104</sup> The bones and shroud of Nyang Ta-thâ-ga-ta.<sup>105</sup> Milarepa's loincloth... Long Life Pellets of the Karmapa school which include the 'increasing bone' of Yang-ston-pa. A garuḍa bird<sup>106</sup> claw discovered at Mdzo-nag. Earth and stone from various parts of Tibet... Precious stones. Medicinal herbs. Food. Grains. Cloth.

There follow several long quotes prophecying the opening of the Hidden Country (Sbas Yul) of Sikkim, the author of this piece

being the person credited with its ‘opening’.<sup>107</sup> Then there are more ‘advertisements’, saying that three years of meditation can be accomplished in three days at this chorten; finally, more prophecies and praises of Sikkim.

*Chorten Guide by Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen (1697-1774)*<sup>108</sup>

Zhu-chen was a monk of the Sakyapa (Sa-skyapa) school, famous as a poet, but mainly remembered for his role as main editor (*zhu-chen*) of the collection of Indic treatises in Tibetan translation—the Tanjur—as it was printed in Derge (Sde-dge). Among his works is a two volume catalogue of the Derge Tanjur. Zhu-chen’s description, beginning as is usual with scriptural citations demonstrating the merits to be gained by building a chorten, tells us how this particular chorten was constructed in Derge through the efforts of the Lama Lhun-grub-ting-’dzin in memory of the abbot ’Jam-dbyangs-bsod-nams.<sup>109</sup> Zhu-chen’s list begins with the insertion of *dhâraṇī* (which he calls by one of their common names, ‘Dharmabody relics’) into various parts of the interior. Then the listing of other relics (the *gdung ring-bsrel*)<sup>110</sup> begins:

Two genuine ‘increasing bone’ of the Tathâgata the size of mustard seeds. Hair of Sa-skyapa Paṇḍi-ta.<sup>111</sup> Clothing of Chos-rje Bla-ma Dam-pa.<sup>112</sup> *Tsha-tsha*<sup>113</sup> in the shape of White Târâ containing relics of Dkon-mchog-dpal-ldan-pa. Clothing of Dpal-ldan-don-grub. Powdered bone of Nam-mkha’-rin-chen. *Tsha-tsha* in the shape of Hevajra containing relics of Mkhan-chen Bzang-po-rgyal-mtshan. Clothing of Sangs-rgyas-phun-tshogs.<sup>114</sup> The entire head of hair of Bsod-nams-bzang-po. Clothing and powdered bone of Bkra-shis-lhun-grub. A single tooth, powdered bone, clothing of the All Knowing Tshul-khrims-lhun-grub-pa. Bone ash of Mkhan-chen Sangs-rgyas-dpal-bzang-pa. Hair of Shug-ra-ba Kun-dga’-dpal-’byor. Bones of the Vajraholder Bkra-shis-bzang-po. The Great Siddha Thang-stong-rgyal-po’s<sup>115</sup> Long Life Pellets. Seven Rebirth (as Brahmin) Pellets of Dga’-ldan-pa.<sup>116</sup> Pellets consecrated by the Panchen Lama. Elixir Pellets made by the Lamas of Ngor.<sup>117</sup>

There follows a long list of images of saints and Buddhas which were inserted, in other words, *tsha-tsha* made of clay which contained the following relics:

Tooth of the Bodhisattva Chos-’phags.<sup>118</sup> Bones of Sa-chen.<sup>119</sup> Shroud (? *sku-chings*) of Bsod-nams-rtse-mo.<sup>120</sup> Coat of Rje-btsun-grags-pa. Hair of Sa-skyapa Paṇḍi-ta. Dance costume of the previous [Sakyapa] masters. Sleeve cloth and coat of Sa-lo.<sup>121</sup> A cover used when transporting a leather mask (? )

*bse 'bag*) from India. Skull of Bdag-chen Ngag-dbang-po. Hair of 'Jam-dbyangs-kun-dga'-bsod-nams.<sup>122</sup> Sleeve cloth and bones of Glo-bo Mkhan-chen...<sup>123</sup> Bones of a long list of other Sakyapa saints. Earth and water from holy places in India, Nepal and Tibet including Bodhgaya, the Nairāṇajā River and so forth.

These relics, with yellow cloth and fragrances, filled the entire chorten up to the top of the 'vessel' (*bum-pa*) part. Various types of jewels and precious stones were enclosed. Sandalwood. Myrobalan (*a-ru-ra*) fruits. Herbs. Incense. Sugar. Molasses. Honey. Grains. Chinese tea. Mud from Lake Manasarovar. Pebbles from glacier mountains. Various fruits. The work ends with a brief account of the consecration carried out by the author himself, and the dedication of merit.

*Gung-thang-pa's (1762-1823) Guides to the Contents of Several Chortens including one Erected in Memory of Blo-bzang-bkra-shis*<sup>124</sup>

This Guide, unlike the others summarized here, is a simple list of contents without further description of the chorten or surrounding area. It is included within a larger work devoted to such 'content lists' of both chortens and images.<sup>125</sup> The life of Gung-thang-pa, a renowned Gelugpa cleric, abbot of Tashikhyil Monastery<sup>126</sup> in Amdo, Northeast Tibet, has already been described,<sup>127</sup> so we will go directly to the Guide itself:

Genuine 'increasing bone' of the Buddha. Clothing and hair of Atiśa.<sup>128</sup> Clothing of Sa-skyā Paṇḍi-ta<sup>129</sup> and of Chos-rje Don-grub Rin-po-che.<sup>130</sup> Hair, clothing and shroud of Bdag-nyid-chen-po [one of the Sakya hierarchs, unspecified]. Clothing of Lho-brag Grub-chen.<sup>131</sup> Clothing of the translator from Rwa.<sup>132</sup> Hair and clothing of Thang-stong-rgyal-po.<sup>133</sup> Clothing of Rgyal-tshab-rje.<sup>134</sup> Hair and clothing of Mkhas-grub-rje.<sup>135</sup> Clothing of 'Dul-'dzin-pa.<sup>136</sup> Hair and clothing of Ba-so Chos-rgyan.<sup>137</sup> Hair of the Second Dalai Lama Dge-'dun-rgya-mtsho (1475-1542). Clothing of the Third Dalai Lama Bsod-nams-rgya-mtsho (1543-1588). Hair of the Fourth Dalai Lama Yon-tan-rgya-mtsho (1589-1616). Hair, a book, and clothing of the First Panchen Lama Blo-bzang-chos-rgyan.<sup>138</sup> Hair and fingernails of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). Clothing of the Second Panchen Lama Blo-bzang-ye-shes (1663-1737). Hair and clothing of the Seventh Dalai Lama Bskal-bzang-rgya-mtsho (1708-1758). Clothing of Khri-chen Rgyal-mtshan-seng-ge,<sup>139</sup> Dung-dkar 'Brug-grags,<sup>140</sup> the Bya-khyung abbot<sup>141</sup> and others. Hair of Lcang-skyā Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje,<sup>142</sup> the Kanjurwa Incarnate,<sup>143</sup> Grub-dbang Stobs-ldan Rin-po-che,<sup>144</sup> the All Knowing 'Jigs-med-dbang-po,<sup>145</sup> Khri-chen Ngag-dbang-bkra-shis,<sup>146</sup> the Chas-pa Incarnation,<sup>147</sup> Smin-gling

Chos-kyi-rgyal-po<sup>148</sup> and the Sgom-chen Rin-po-che<sup>149</sup> himself. Bones of Rje Chos-skyong-rgya-mtsho and Khri Nam-mkha'-bzang.<sup>150</sup> Embalming salts (*pur tshwa*) of the Master of Spiritual Accomplishment<sup>151</sup> himself. Four thousand images of the Rje Bla-ma,<sup>152</sup> four thousand images of the Medicine Buddha (Sman-bla), one thousand each of Amitâyus and Târâ, a little more than a thousand other images, among them the eight Sugatas, Amitâbha, Mañjuśrî, Avalokiteśvara, Bhairava and Vijâya. Many pellets containing various objects of worship (*rten*) from India and Tibet. Wood, stone, earth and water from holy places of India, China, Western Tibet (Mnga'-ris), Nepal, Central Tibet (Dbus-gtsang) and Eastern Tibet (Mdo-smad). In addition, fragrant herbs, types of incense, powder of precious substances, and so on. These completely filled the interior without leaving any remaining space. As the most important of the 'four types of relics',<sup>153</sup> the Dharmabody relics, or *dhâraṇî*, were inscribed according to custom and inserted into the upper, lower and middle parts of the chorten.

Before leaving Gung-thang-pa, we would like to mention some of the more interesting items from the other chorten content lists within the same larger work. One content list includes books: the 'root tantras' of *Cakrasamvara* and *Guhyasamâja*; the *Bodhisattvacaryâvatâra*, the *Lam-rim Chen-mo* of Tsongkhapa, etc.<sup>154</sup> There are fingernails and blood ('body vermillion', *sku-mtshal*) relics. There are Tsongkhapa's urine (*gsang-chab*) pellets,<sup>155</sup> nasal blood (*shangs khrag*) of the Fifth Dalai Lama, rosaries, *tsha-tsha* made by the hands of Smṛti<sup>156</sup> and the Panchen Lama.

Then there is one curious statement about a genuine starter (*phab-rgyun*, as in 'yeast starter' for making beer or yoghurt) for many ancient supports of worship (*rten*)<sup>157</sup> which contained hair, tooth, bone and clothing relics of an impressive array of saints; Nyingma, Kargyudpa, Gelugpa and Sakyapa saints, about forty-four all told, if we count the Seven Rebirths (as Brahmins) Flesh. As the yeast starter analogy makes clear, we are dealing with a substance consecrated by minute, and probably extremely minute traces of relics added to the 'brew' through centuries of consecration rites, similar to the way Tibetan beer is made with the residues from earlier batches, thus preserving and transmitting the mold spores necessary for fermentation.<sup>158</sup>

In a later list, we find hand and foot imprints (*rjes*), copies of texts for chanting which belonged to many holy persons, double headed *dâmaru* drums, vajras, bells,<sup>159</sup> and a natural syllable *Om* made of bone.<sup>160</sup> In yet other lists are handkerchiefs (*shangs-phyis*), powder of various persons' bones and clothing mixed together, pellets made with bones of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

*Kong-sprul's (1813-1899) Guide to the Chorten Built to Enshrine the Remains of his Bonpo Teacher G. yung-drung-phun-tshogs*<sup>161</sup>

So far, we have examined one chorten Guide by a Nyingma Ter-ton, one by a Sakyapa literary figure, and another by a Gelugpa hierarch. Now we turn to the fourth and last Guide by the most famous of several great leaders of what has been called the Universalist or Nonsectarian (Ris-med) movement. Kong-sprul started life as a Bonpo (about which, more shortly), then entered a Nyingma monastery and, finally, became a Kargyudpa monk. These moves from monasteries of one sect to those of another were simply that for him. He had a strong appetite for knowledge that could not be satisfied by a single school. Indeed, it could not be confined to religious studies; his medical works, for example, are contemporary classics in the field. By entering the Nyingma monastery, he did not, even if it may have been expected of him, *renounce* his Bonpo past. He devoted himself to Bon studies throughout his life and, the present text being one proof, continued to hold his Bonpo teachers in the highest esteem. Kong-sprul did not necessarily crusade against intolerance; he was just not the sort of person who could understand why intolerance should exist, or why others should find sectarian affiliations so overwhelmingly important.<sup>162</sup>

The Bon school is not easy to characterize simply (and simple characterizations are dangerous, generally). It claims direct descent from a (not necessarily *the*) pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet which had its founding moment when Gshen-rab-mi-bo (16,016-7,816 B.C.)<sup>163</sup> visited Tibet in pursuit of stolen horses. Kong-sprul's Guide begins with a sketch of Bon doctrine and history which, despite its interest, cannot be disentangled here. Bon was and is the subject of much polemic in Tibetan life and literature, but for our purposes it is enough to say that, as it has existed in the last millenium, it in any case supplies its adherents basically the same sorts of answers to the same religious needs as do the other sects.

The teacher whose relics were to be enshrined in the chorten, G. yung-drung-phun-tshogs, took monastic vows at Sman-ri Monastery, the principal educational center for Bon studies in Gtsang province of central Tibet, and spent much of his life engaged in religious retreats. That his contemplative visualizations included Old (Nyingma) and New Tantras as well as Bonpo



divinities makes it a little more understandable that Kong-sprul, as his student, would follow a career of intersectorian tolerance. Kong-sprul tells further details of his teacher's life; but let us turn now to the contents of the chorten built in his honor. The Bon relics (*ring-bsrel*) are divided in five classes:

- 1) Bon Relics: The collected *dhâranî* of Bon written in gold and silver on azure colored paper. Many other canonical Bonpo *dhâranî* and sûtras (listed by title). One volume, it should be noted, was printed on Chinese paper using ink made of vermillion mixed with jewel (powder), herbs and relics (of the most general category of 'blessing supports', *byin-rten*).
- 2) Mustard seed like relics: In the uppermost tip of the chorten, a relic (*sha-rî-ram*) larger than a Tibetan pea which came from the bone of Khyung-po Rang-grol Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan.<sup>164</sup> A pea sized relic which came from the bone of Sku-mdun Bsod-nams-blo-gros.<sup>165</sup>
- 3) Bon image relics: A thousand images each of some eleven Bonpo deities and saints made from clay mixed with the ashes of Kong-sprul's teacher, G. yung-drung-phun-tshogs. Other images.
- 4) Physical remains relics (*sku-gdung-gi ring-bsrel*): In the upper, east part of the inside of the 'vessel' (*bum-pa*), a tooth of Bru Nam-mkha'-g.yung-drung<sup>166</sup> marked by two white mustard seed like relics (*sha-rî-ram*). A dark maroon colored letter 'M' which appeared on the heart of Stag-la of Khyung-po. A skull relic of Do-shang Bla-ma marked by a golden color. Khyung-za Chos-sgron's<sup>167</sup> skull with a naturally formed letter 'A'. Remains of many learned and spiritually accomplished persons of all sects (not listed).
- 5) Clothing (etc.) relics: Hair, hats, clothing, rosaries, handprints, etc., of some thirty-five different Bonpos (names listed), for the most part belonging to the thirteenth century or later.

As a final, distinct category, Kong-sprul lists the consecrated articles from the *Chos* traditions, by which is meant all the Tibetan Buddhist sects besides Bon:

Consecrated articles of the *Chos* traditions: An Indian book which belonged to the great translator Vairocana. Flesh of Seven Times Reborn as Brahmin Pellets. Consecrated articles of the Karmapas [including] Great Black Pellets (Ril Nag Chen-mo). Elixir Pellets (Bdud-rtsi Ril-bu) of the Ngor subject of the Sakyapa school. Other types of blessed, consecrated articles which were contained in the 'worship box' (*rten sgam*) of the Derge ruling family (Sakkyong Sde-dge) including Nyingmapa, Karmapa, Drukpa ('Brug-pa), Sakyapa and Gelugpa articles.

Then there is a description of the materials used to build the chorten and the method used in its construction, in this case following the instructions from a work by Kun-grol-grags-pa.<sup>168</sup> Then there is a list of holy places of India, Tibet and Nepal, whence came



earth, stone, wood, grass, flowers, etc., which were enclosed. Kong-sprul ends with quotations from Bon scriptures to demonstrate the benefits of circumambulating, prostrating, and lighting lamps at a chorten.

*More Evidence: Consecration and Dhâraṇī Insertion Texts*

So far, we have looked at chorten Guides in some way connected with all five of the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism; but let us now have a look at a different type of literature, texts which describe the actual process of consecration. One Gelugpa chorten consecration has already been studied elsewhere. The author is the first Lcang-skye incarnate, Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-chos-ldan (1642-1714).<sup>169</sup> He supplies the following general classification of relics (*ring-bsrel*) aside from the *dhâraṇī*, which are also included in his discussion:

- 1) Mustard seeds like relics: 'Increasing bone' of the Tathâgata and so forth.
- 2) Remains (*sku-gdung*) relics: Remains of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
- 3) Clothing (*sku-bal*) relics: Hair, nails, clothing and so forth, of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.<sup>170</sup>

My second example of a chorten consecration text (or, more technically speaking, a 'dhâraṇī insertion' text) is that of 'Bri-gung Rig-'dzin Chos-kyi-grags-pa (b. 1595). The title of this work, written in 1636 A.D., translates—*Ocean of the Two Accumulations [of Merit and Total Knowledge]: Ritual Methods for Inserting the Five [Types of] Relics (ring-bsrel)*.<sup>171</sup> It deals with consecration rites for images as well as chortens. Beginning with comments on the correct mensuration of images and chortens, it then quotes at length from the *Kûtâgâra Sûtra*<sup>172</sup> on the merits of building chortens. Then we are happily supplied with a most thorough classification of relics:

- 1) Dharmabody relics: These might be understood to be "Dharma incorporating"<sup>173</sup> relics. These relics, which indicate the nature of the Dharmabody, include the eight chortens and *tsha-tshas* which in turn contain *dhâraṇī*, for instance those of Śâkyamuni, Uṣṇîṣavijâya, Vimaloṣṇîṣa, and so on.
- 2) Mustard seed like relics: These come from the bones of special people such as the three types of saints.<sup>174</sup> Those which are transparent in color and as big as a pea or larger are called *gdung*. Those smaller than this are called *ring-bsrel*. In the *Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba* and other tantras of the Nyingma Secret Mantra, there is a division into five: *sha-ri-ram*, *ba-ri-ram*, *chu-ri-ram*, *nya-ri-ram*, and *panytsa-ram*.<sup>175</sup> But these are only divisions according to color. They, as

well as all the other *gdung* and *ring-bsrel*, are included within the category of mustard seed like relics.

3) Dharma relics: Mantras from Vajrayāna literature and *dhāraṇī* from Sūtrayāna literature. All the pronouncements of the Buddhas as well as reliable commentaries on the same are included in this category.

4) Remains (*sku-gdung*) relics: The remains of the Root Guru or other superior personages, of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Hearers and Solitary Realizers. Body (images), Speech (scriptures) and Mind (chortens) receptacles which include the preceding. This category generally includes such things as their flesh, blood and bones.

5) Clothing (*sku-bal*) relics: Hair of those same sorts of personages. Their finger or toe nails, clothing, etc. In general, anything blessed by its connection with their bodies.

This work has many interesting details on the treatment of relics (example: one should not insert entire articles of clothing, but rather fragments or ashes) and on the consecration rituals themselves, which cannot be treated here due to their great complexity and variation.<sup>176</sup>

My final examples are from another work by Kong-sprul.<sup>177</sup> He supplies the following classification:

- 1) Dharmabody relics: *dhāraṇī* and mantras.
- 2) Remains relics: remains of supreme personages.
- 3) Clothing relics: pieces of hair, fingernails and so forth.
- 4) Mustard seed like relics: Those things known as ‘increasing bone’ and *sha-rī-ram*, particularly those from the Buddha.

Then he cites an alternative classification from a text that had been “recently” translated from Chinese into Tibetan in the eighteenth century,<sup>178</sup> the *Bodhigarbhālamkāra*:

- 1) Dharmabody relics: *sātstsha* (= *tsha-tsha*) and chortens.
- 2) Tathāgata relics: same as 2 in preceding list.
- 3) Clothing relics: same as 3 in preceding list.
- 4) Dharma relics: *dhāraṇī*, mantras and volumes of scripture.
- 5) Mere mustard seed relics (*yungs-'bru tsam-gyi ring-bsrel*): same as 4 in preceding list.

Kong-sprul does not find these designations and definitions in any essential conflict, although the very different definitions for Dharmabody relics are worth noting.

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Please note that part of this material, viewed in its historical dimension, is subject of a short paper entitled 'Crystals and Images from Bodies, Hearts and Tongues from Fire: Points of Relic Controversy from Tibetan History', forthcoming in the proceedings of the Fifth International Association for Tibetan Studies Conference held at Narita, Japan, on August 1989.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, of course, is believed to have ascended into heaven with His body, thus limiting (but not entirely) the availability of His bodily remains. I have not learned about the preservation of any of Muhammed's *bodily* relics, although the hairs of his beard seem to be widely spread. I heard that a few hairs from Muhammed's beard were kept in a reliquary box at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. His footprints are also said to be found there. Jesus's footprints are believed to be on the Mount of Olives just across the valley from the Dome of the Rock. For more on Christian relics and on relics generally, see Bentley, *Restless Bones*. This is the most readable book I have found on the subject, although there are many. For an interesting comparison between Buddhist and Christian relics, see Benard, 'Living Among the Dead.'

<sup>2</sup> Geertz, *Islam Observed*, p. 44. This is related to Hebrew *brachah*, with the same meaning.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek *kharis pneumatike*, or *dynamis*; MacCulloch, 'Relics', p. 654.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Ekvall, *Religious Observances*, p. 156. One more imaginative ethnographer has given the translation 'splendourous ripples' (Stablein, 'Medical-Cultural System', p. 195).

<sup>5</sup> Inagaki, 'Kūkai's *Sokushin-Jōbutsu-Gi*', p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> Basic literal meaning of the Sanskrit word is 'being near, being at hand, resting upon, indwelling', etc.

<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps the most general term, being used to cover not only sacred icons, but consecrated articles (about which, more below) and relics, as all are 'receptacles of blessings'.

<sup>8</sup> The two optional categories, more frequently encountered in Nyingmapa and Bon sources, are 'quality' (*yon-tan*) and 'action' (*'phrin-las*).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that all three 'receptacles' may contain relics of some sort, the 'Speech receptacles', or holy books, being no exception. Small quantities of relics could be, and were (examples below), mixed with ink. Shakabpa (*Bod-kyi Srid-don*, vol. I, p. 56) notes that cremation ash could be mixed with the ink used in copying scriptures.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, many reliquaries and images have been opened by museum curators, art collectors and the like, and their contents 'scientifically' investigated. This I leave to the scientists, not having any inclination for such morbid business. I put this activity in one class with icon destruction, grave robbing and other such acts which reflect a fundamental attitude of disrespect toward both the living and

the dead. It is, when done with the usual motivations, an insensitive act of desecration. One exceptionally well informed and thorough example of this approach should be mentioned; Robert A. Hatt, 'A Thirteenth Century Tibetan Reliquary'.

<sup>11</sup> I have now dealt in some detail with this issue in Martin, 'Crystals and Images.'

<sup>12</sup> There is also a kind of dust, called *manna*, that was sometimes miraculously emitted from saints' tombs (see Duncan-Flowers, 'Pilgrim's Ampulla', p. 128 ff.) and the miraculous emissions of oil, called 'myrrh', noted in Bakirtzis, 'Byzantine Ampullae', p. 141 ff.

<sup>13</sup> See McCulloh, 'From Antiquity to the Middle Ages.'

<sup>14</sup> Since writing these words, an extremely illuminating book on the nature of Tertons and their rediscoveries has appeared—Thondup Rinpoche, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*. One of the most remarkable things about this book, besides the clarity with which it shows the identity of terma texts with relics, is the number of full color pictures of relic-images (called *sku-tshab*, 'representatives') which were rediscovered together with texts (*ibid.*, p. 151).

<sup>15</sup> More often than not, these mass migrations to Hidden Countries were aimed at southern 'uncivilized' (according to Tibetan perceptions) areas. For one such attempt at Tibetan colonization in the first years of the twentieth century which failed, see Lamb, *McMahon*, vol. 2, p. 320. For the Tibetan side of the same story, see Bernbaum, *The Way to Shambhala*, pp. 69-70. See also Brauen-Dolma, 'Millenarianism' and works cited there.

<sup>16</sup> See Lha-btsun's Guide, where rediscovered manuscripts as well as consecrated articles and relics were enclosed during the consecration. Kong-sprul's Guide includes canonical Bonpo sūtras as well as "an Indian book which belonged to the great translator Vairocana." Vairocana lived in the late eighth to early ninth centuries. An "Indian book of the great translator Vairocana" is mentioned among objects placed in the chorten for enshrining the remains of the Third Pan-chen Lama. See Paṇ-chen III, *Collected Works*, vol. 13, p. 573.3.

<sup>17</sup> An informal survey of the part of Dargyay's *Rise of Esoteric Buddhism* where she translates summary biographies of the Tertons shows, apart from sealed boxes buried under earth or stone, the following rediscovery sites: temples (15), caves (8), images (7), chortens (4), lakes (2), and pillars (1).

<sup>18</sup> Dge-ri. An unidentified place name. See Roerich, *Blue Annals*, p. 1053, where the building of a chorten in this place is mentioned.

<sup>19</sup> Probably an eccentric representation of Prabhahasti (= Pra-bha-ha-ti), one of the Eight Great Sages (Rig-'dzin) who also include Padmasambhava in their number. Prabhahasti is especially connected with the revelation of the Nyingma *Vajrakīla* (*Phur-pa*) Tantra; Thondup, *Tantric Tradition*, pp. 16, 18, *et passim*. We must note that the "red and white reproductive substances," or "red and white Bodhicitta" (Byang-sems dkar dmar) are not *just* reproductive substances *per se*. They derive from the parents and are believed to continue (somehow) in the body. When saintly lamas die, they are sometimes said to emit these substances from their right and left nostrils. See Barlocher, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 448 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Ratna-gling-pa, *Collected Rediscovered Teachings*, vol. 1, p. 159. This biography was compiled by Nor-bu-yongs-grags (seventeenth century) who preserved earlier biographical and autobiographical material intact.

<sup>21</sup> See now Aris, *Hidden Treasures*. The nature of the rediscoveries themselves is not so well covered in this treatment of the life of Padma-gling-pa. There is an

interesting references to “a relic... spontaneously produced from one of his teeth.” (p. 66).

<sup>22</sup> *Rnying-ma Rgyud-'bum* (1982, vol. 11, pp. 788-815; 1973, vol. 9, pp. 600-624).

<sup>23</sup> This naturally makes it difficult to leave bodily relics. Allione, *Women of Wisdom*, pp. 192-3 (note 42), gives a description which closely reflects some Tibetan beliefs on these ‘disappearing lamas’. It is interesting to note that they are said to leave their hair and nails behind. We have seen how hair and nails belong to the ‘clothing’ (*sku-bal*) relic category, as things closely connected with, but not a part of, the body.

<sup>24</sup> These same signs are discussed by Thondup, *Tantric Tradition*, pp. 194-5, note 163.

<sup>25</sup> Dargyay, *Rise of Esoteric*, p. 214 (note 60), calls these images *rtēn*. In my experience (admittedly limited), they are always called simply *sku* (‘body, image’) with the specific meaning known only by context. To quote Dargyay in full, “The Tibetan language has different terms for the various kinds of relics. There are *rtēn* and *ring-srel*—relics. *rtēn* signifies relics in the shape of Stupas or gods that originated from parts of the corpse during the cremation. *ring-bsrel* denotes some whitish pill-like stuff that also came from the cremation residues.”

<sup>26</sup> These types of relics will be discussed later on. It is interesting to compare a text representing the words of Zhang G.yu-brag-pa (1123-1193) to his disciples in a Wood Mouse year (1144?—This seems too early, and there is probably a mistake in the date). This text identifies the five relics (*gdung*) of the Tathāgata as: 1) *sha-ri-ram* which depends on the flesh; 2) *chu-ri-ram*, which depends on the blood; 3) *nya-ri-ram*, which depends on the marrow; 4) *ba-ri-ram*, which depends on the bones and cartilage; 5) *ka-ri-ram*, which depends on the brain and sinews. This passage occurs in Zhang, *Bka'-rgya-ma*, vol. 2, pp. 2.6-3.1. Further (Nyingmapa) sources on these types of relics are cited in Sde-srid, *'Dzam-gling-rgyan-gcig*, pp. 563-66.

<sup>27</sup> Hyer and Jagchid, *Mongolian Living Buddha*, p. 12. Sanskrit spellings have been corrected in the citation. ‘Sharil’ seems to have been borrowed into Tibetan as *sha-ril*, to mean relics with images in relief (see *Bod Rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, p. 2828).

<sup>28</sup> In the Sku-tshab-gter-lnga temple in the Thāk district of Nepal, D. Snellgrove noticed, “a section of the skull of [a] ... lama with the Tibetan letter A embossed as it were on the bone, for he had meditated so long on this basic vowel-sound, which lies at the root of all existence, that it had produced its written symbol miraculously inside his skull.” Snellgrove, *Himalayan Pilgrimage*, p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Allione, *Women of Wisdom*, pp. 203-4 (note 140; see also p. xxiv, note 1). Note as well M. Slusser’s (*Nepal Mandala*, vol. I, p. 151, no. 69) statement: “According to a Buddhist monk I once talked with at Svayambhū, they [stūpas] also contain *rincils*, a divine substance which in the form of firm, white variously sized beads mysteriously spews out of stupas on occasions. They are exceedingly precious and, wrapped in brocade and silk, as I have shown, are conserved in phials as reliquaries.”

<sup>30</sup> See Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, pp. 153-182, the chapter entitled ‘War with the Gurkhas and Dogras.’

<sup>31</sup> It is on this day that Tibetans celebrate the birth, Enlightenment and final Nirvāṇa of Śākyamuni Buddha, hence ‘three holidays in one’ (*dus-chen gsum 'dzom*).

<sup>32</sup> Bodhanath is the other great chorten of the Nepalese valley. Swayambhunath is to the west of Kathmandu, while Bodhanath lies to the east.

<sup>33</sup> *nya-mig-ma*. For another reference to ‘fish eyes’ in a relic context, see Dpa’-bo, *Mkhas-pa’i Dga’-ston*, vol. 2, p. 641.

<sup>34</sup> Rdo-ring Bka’-blon, *Rdo-ring Paṇḍi-ta’i Rnam-thar*, vol. 2, pp. 850-851. I must thank Tashi Tshering of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (Dharamsala) for pointing out this passage to me.

<sup>35</sup> From the biography of Rong-ston as contained in Śākya-mchog-ldan, *Complete Works*, vol. 16, pp. 299-378, at p. 365.

<sup>36</sup> Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, pt. 3, p. 321. Von Hammer’s unique theory about the nature of *ring-bsrel* might be based on a misapprehension of the idea (attested in the passage from the *Bka’-gdams Glegs-bam* cited elsewhere) that they appear as signs of highly developed Bodhicitta (‘awakened heart’ being one possible translation).

<sup>37</sup> A reliably early account of *ring-bsrel* appearing after a cremation is found in the biography of Sgam-po-pa (1079-1153) written by his disciple ‘Ba’-rom-pa (1127-1203?)—see O-rgyan-pa, *Dkar-brgyud*, pp. 267, 269.

<sup>38</sup> Gyalzur, ‘Spells on the Life-Wood’, p. 180.

<sup>39</sup> Sangay, *Bod Mi’i ’Das Mchod*, p. 1, where *ring-bsrel* are crushed and mixed with ‘yak’ (the female ‘bri, naturally) or cow butter and placed in the mouth of the dying person. For an English summary of the same work by Sangay, see *Tibetan Medicine*, series no. 7 (1984), pp. 30-40, under the title ‘Tibetan Ritual for the Dead’. Shakabpa (*Bod-kyi Srid-don*, vol. 1, p. 56) also attests to this practice, as does Rdo-ring Bka’-blon, *Rdo-ring Paṇḍi-ta’i Rnam-thar* (vol. 2, p. 841), a work dating to the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century.

<sup>40</sup> In Tibetan, the word *mi-chos* has various uses, one of them in the field of law, but it is also used to mean ‘religion of the people’. In the latter case, the term is in opposition to *lha-chos*, ‘religion of the gods’, which means Buddhist methods for transcending the mundane realm. Comparing the meanings of *mi-chos* and our term ‘popular religion’ only seems to complicate matters in this context, since they share only a small part of their semantic fields. The greater part of Tibetans’ popular religious practices are very clearly Buddhist, having their justifications and inspirations in Buddhists scriptures, while the goals of these practices (in any case the *final* goals) are Buddhist ones.

<sup>41</sup> The Nyingma teacher Rong-zom-pa Chos-kyi-bzang-po (eleventh century) was also a scholastic, although his works do not focus so directly on problems of method. Phywa-pa Chos-kyi-seng-ge (1109-1169) might deserve the title of ‘founding father’ of Tibetan scholastic method even more than Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta, but his works are no longer available (except in citations) and they have certainly not had the enduring influence on Tibetan education as have those of Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta. For valuable material on Phywa-pa Chos-kyi-seng-ge, his influence on Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta and many others during this period, see Kuijp, ‘Phya-pa Chos-kyi Seng-ge’s Impact’.

<sup>42</sup> See especially the passage in Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta, *Sdom-pa Gsum-gyi Rab-tu Dbye-ba’i Bstan-bcos*, p. 69b (line 1, ff.), where he criticizes people for following the letter rather than the intentions of these sorts of statements (which are, after all, commonly found in many sūtras). In effect, he criticizes them for not being sufficiently educated or intelligent to recognize commonplace rhetorical devices. *Dkar-po gcig-thub* means ‘white one-is-enough’. It is an epithet applied to more than one medicinal substance meaning that a single ingredient is deemed sufficient for

relieving the disease—most medicinal treatments prescribed by Tibetan doctors are compounds, with those of 25 or more ingredients not at all unusual. Recent discussions of *dkar-po gcig-thub* have focussed too narrowly on the philosophical aspects, entirely missing Sa-skyā Paṇḍi-ta's uses of the term in relation to popular religious practices (see especially Broido, 'Sa-skyā Paṇḍita', Jackson, 'Sa-skyā Paṇḍita', and references supplied there).

<sup>43</sup> To hearts and tongues we should add eyes. Sometimes when saints are cremated, the hearts, tongue or eyes (or all three) remain unburned. This is a sign that the mind, speech and body (respectively) of the saint have achieved close approximation to the Mind, Speech and Body of Buddhahood. In the 1484 A.D. history of the Bka'-gdams-pa sect by Bsod-nams-lha'i-dbang-po it is said that when one of the greatest Bka'-gdams-pa teachers of the eleventh century, Po-to-ba (1027-1105), was cremated, "heart, tongue and many *ring-bsrel* of the five different colors emerged." (See *Two Histories of the Bka'-gdams-pa Tradition*, p. 314.8.)

<sup>44</sup> The 'images (*sku-gzugs*) and so forth' referred to in this context are the divine images and syllables which appear in relief on the bones of deceased saints. On this point, the commentaries are in agreement. The fifteenth century commentary by Spos-khang-pa (vol. 3, p. 337) quotes reports (while reserving judgement on their truth value) to the effect that these images are caused by Generation Stage contemplations and that *ring-bsrel* are produced by cultivation of Bodhicitta (Enlightened Thought); but see Ramble, 'Status', p. 348, n. 24, for another explanation. The probable source of Spos-khang-pa is the Bka'-gdams *Glegs-bam* (see below).

<sup>45</sup> As Mkhan-chen Sangs-rgyas-bstan-'dzin (writing in 1954) interprets in his commentary (p. 260, line 4), these genuine *ring-bsrel* should be a subject for confidence since they become worship supports for the accumulation of merit by embodied beings through touching, thinking or hearing about, and perceiving them. The commentary of Spos-khang-pa (vol. 3, p. 334) has a different reading for this passage which makes both the strength of the saintly qualities of the deceased as well as the strength of merit of embodied ones to be causes for the occurrence of *ring-bsrel*.

<sup>46</sup> According to the same commentary by the Mkhan-chen (p. 260, line 5), the genuine *ring-bsrel* is like a jewel which is known to have come from its place of origin in the ocean or a mine and hence of unquestionable authenticity.

<sup>47</sup> The Mkhan-chen (p. 261, line 2) suggests that they might be manufactured out of various substances (including mother-of-pearl and ivory) and through magical illusions.

<sup>48</sup> It is significant that Sa-skyā Paṇḍi-ta did not include *ring-bsrel* among the items not mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams-seng-ge (1429-1489), in his commentary as contained in the *Sa-skyā Bka'-'bum* (vol. 14, p. 193d, line 4) cites the *Bskal-bzang* (*Bhadrakalpā*) *Sūtra* (Toh. no. 94) and the *Meeting of Father and Son Sūtra* (Toh. no. 60) of the *Dkon-brtsegs* section as scriptural sources for *ring-bsrel*. That the 'images' are mentioned in the *Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba*, would not impress Sa-skyā Paṇḍi-ta; he would not have accepted this tantra as a genuine scripture, along with most of the other Nyingma tantras and rediscoveries (*gter-ma*).

<sup>49</sup> Spos-khang-pa (vol. 3, p. 338, line 4) specifies that these *ring-bsrel* produced by living persons come from their teeth, hair or armpits.

<sup>50</sup> According to Mkhan-chen Sangs-rgyas-bstan-'dzin (p. 262, line 3), these occurrences were said to be bad signs in the *Stag Sna* Avadāna (i.e., *Stag Rna*; Toh. no. 358). The fifteenth century commentary by Ngag-dbang-chos-grags (p. 431, line 1) was his most likely source for this statement.



<sup>51</sup> Mkhan-chen Sangs-rgyas-bstan-'dzin p. 262.6) cites a passage from the *Mig Bcu-gnyis-pa Sūtra* (Toh. no. 359) which says that moving or crying images are signs of calamity. Ngag-dbang-chos-grags (p. 431, line 2) adds the birth of strange animals to the list of prodigies and quotes a passage from the *Mig Bcu-gnyis-pa* (the name means 'Twelve Eyes'). I have now discussed these sūtra passages in Martin, 'Crystals and Images'.

<sup>52</sup> The Tibetan text for the translated passage begins on page 318a, line 3, of the *Sdom-pa Gsum-gyi Rab-tu Dbye-ba* as found in the collected works of Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta in the *Sa-skya Bka'-'bum* (vol. 5, pp. 297-320). It may also be found in Sa-skya Paṇḍita, *Sdom-pa Gsum-gyi Rab-tu Dbye-ba'i Bstan-bcos*, pp. 88a-89b.

<sup>53</sup> Kun-dga'-bsod-nams, *Sa-skya'i Gdung-rabs*, p. 144.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145. On the dating problem for the translator of Yar-lung who worked in Kathmandu, Nepal, Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, who probably lived in the late 13th to 14th centuries, see Kvaerne, *An Anthology*, p. 2. See now Martin, 'Crystals and Images'.

<sup>55</sup> This work, entitled *Gnas Gsum Gsal-byed Nor-bu'i Me-long*, is found in Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje, *Responses*, pp. 327-463. Sa Pan's passage on relics was also noted by Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho in his work, first published in 1701, on the tomb-chorten for the Fifth Dalai Lama (Sde-srid, 'Dzam-gling-rgyan-gcig, p. 563).

<sup>56</sup> On Tsari, see Martin, 'For Love or Religion?', and Sorensen, *Divinity Secularized*, pp. 113-142.

<sup>57</sup> For his arguments, see Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta, *Sdom-pa Gsum-gyi*, pp. 65-70 (or the same passage as contained in the *Sa-skya Bka'-'bum*, vol. 5, p. 312 ff.).

<sup>58</sup> The passage rendered here is found in Sangs-rgyas-rdo-rje, *Responses*, pp. 430,3-435.5.

<sup>59</sup> These four pairs of extremes are: 1. creationist positivism—cessationist nihilism. 2. eternalist positivism—apocalyptic nihilism. 3. existence positivism—nonexistence nihilism. 4. phenomenal positivism—emptiness nihilism.

<sup>60</sup> For this passage, see Sog-bzlog-pa, "Gsang-sngags Snga-'gyur-la," p. 427.2 ff. We have not yet been able to resolve the problem of the date of Dpal-'dzin's treatise to our satisfaction. It seems his 'circular' appeared not long after the death of Klong-chen-pa in 1363, and *Bod Rgya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol. 3, p. 3244, gives 1400 as the year of composition. For some discussion, see Kuijp, 'Miscellanea', p. 173 (note). The dates of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan are 1552-1624.

<sup>61</sup> For the content and transmission of the *Bka'-gdams Glegs-bam* (or *Jo-bo Glegs-bam*), see *Two Histories*, pp. 33.6, 366.4 ff., 379.8. The present passage is also cited in Sde-srid, 'Dzam-gling-rgyan-gcig, p. 563. An anonymous Kargyudpa work of the thirteenth century (Anon., *Gnad-kyi Them-bu*, p. 27.3) has a rather similar passage:

These are the signs that occur at the time of death—  
When one has realized [the unity of] voidness and compassion,  
there is a shower of flowers.  
When one speaks the truth without ulterior intentions,  
free of artifice, tongues occur.  
When realization has stabilized, hearts occur.  
When the seminal (*kun-da*) bodhicitta is stabilized,  
*ring-/b/srel* occur.  
When one has achieved stability in the generation stage,  
images occur.



<sup>62</sup> This refers to the Sakya teacher Gung-ru-ba Shes-rab-bzang-po (1411-1475), on whom see Jackson, *Early Abbots*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>63</sup> One should also notice in the same work by Sog-bzlog-pa (p. 504.4 ff.), some discussion about various types of *gdung* and *ring-bsrel* as signs of particular degrees of spiritual development. He cites the *Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba* as well as a commentary on the *Gsang-ba Ring-bsrel* (i.e., the *Bodhigarbhāṣṇakāra*) by Bodhibhadra (Slob-dpon Byang-chub-bzang-po). The latter citation contains a four-fold classification: 1) Remains (*sku-gdung*) relics. 2) Mustard seed like remains (*sku-gdung yung-'bru lta-bu*) relics. 3) Clothing (*sku-bal*) relics. 4) Dharmabody (Chos-kyi Sku) relics.

<sup>64</sup> He lived from 1445 to 1521. The best sources so far in English on the life of Padma-gling-pa are Aris, *Bhutan* (index), and Aris, *Hidden Treasures*. The full title of the work is *Kun-bzang Dgongs-pa Kun-'dus-las: Gsang Khrid-kyi Rgyab-skor: Ring-bsrel-gyi Sgrub-pa Dga'-rab-rdo-rjes Mdzad-pa*—found in Padma-gling-pa, *Rediscovered Teachings*, vol. 15, pp. 433-6.

<sup>65</sup> For these 'four appearances' (Vier Aufgänge), see Dargyay, 'Die Ausbildung buddhistischer Mönche in Tibet', p. 109.

<sup>66</sup> Yuthok, *Yuthok's Treatise*, p. 290, where the Six Good Medicinals are:

- 1) *dzâ-ti* (nutmeg).
- 2) *cu-gang* (bamboo manna).
- 3) *gur-gum* (saffron).
- 4) *li-shi* (clove).
- 5) *sukmel* (lesser cardamon).
- 6) *ka-ko-la* (cardamon).

The Five Good Medicinals are the same, minus only the last.

<sup>67</sup> Some readers of earlier drafts of this work have objected to our use of the word 'fraudulence' in this context. It is, admittedly, problematic. We use the word to mean simply that Padma-gling-pa's procedures for making *ring-bsrel* and 'images' emerge after cremation are quite different from what the believers are led to expect. Aris (*Hidden Treasures*) has since called Padma-gling-pa (along with Ter-ton generally) a fraud, although we see little reason to dwell on this issue here.

<sup>68</sup> This tantra is cited under the title *Rdo-rje Thugs-mchog 'Bar-ba*. I was unable to locate any other reference to this text (although the last word 'Bar-ba does remind us of the *Sku-gdung 'Bar-ba*, mentioned elsewhere in these pages). For the text by Zhang G.yu-brag-pa, with colophon title "'Bla-ma'i Sku 'Bag-la Brtan-pa'i [Brtan-pa'i] Le'u," see Zhang, *Writings*, pp. 199.6-202.1 (translated passage at pp. 199.6-200.2).

<sup>69</sup> Gilmour, *Among the Mongols*, p. 231.

<sup>70</sup> The *Ma-ñi Ril-bsgrub-kyi Cho-ga 'Khyer Bde* by Lcang-skyä I Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-chos-ldan (1642-1714) found in supplement to the Suzuki reprint of the *Peking Kanjur and Tanjur*, vol. 164, pp. 116-8; no. 6311. There are numerous other Tibetan texts on the practice available. There have been several studies of the Sherpa's Mani Rimdu, but the most recent and complete one is Kohn, *Mani Rimdu*.

<sup>71</sup> My own observations of the pills themselves form the basis for the description which follows. On Mani Pellets, see Rockhill, 'Lamaist Ceremony'. This hundred year old article also contains interesting information and views about 'increasing bone'.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Ramble, 'Status', pp. 351-353. In some cases the shock is based on gross misperceptions. I am certain that stories of coprophagy among Tibetans are, at base, travellers tales based on the alleged *appearance* of some of the

medicinal pellets dispensed by lamas and physicians, and not on any knowledge of their actual contents (I think in particular of Ekai Kawaguchi, the Japanese Tibet traveller, who repeats a traveller's story that dates back to at least the seventeenth century). Those who wish to trace the literary roots for this cultural misconception should refer to the citations supplied in Bourke, *Scatalogic*, chapter 8, 'The Ordure of the Grand Lama of Thibet.' The statements of Bourke have to be critically read in light of his scatophilia, his date, his comparativism, and his considerable lack of familiarity with things Tibetan. Much of what he says is compromised, also, by his evident confusion of 'phel-gdung with ril-bu. Bourke received a few *ma-ni ril-bu* from Rockhill, and had them analyzed by a Dr. W.M. Mew of the U.S. Army. Dr. Mew sent back the following report to Bourke dated April 18, 1889,

I have at length found time to examine the Grand Lama's ordure, and write to say that I find nothing at all remarkable in it. He had been feeding on a farinaceous diet, for I found by the microscope a large amount of undigested starch in the field, the presence of which I verified by the usual iodine test, which gave an abundant reaction.

There was also present much cellulose, or what appeared to be cellulose, from which I infer that the flour used (which was that of wheat) was of a coarse quality, and probably not made in Minnesota.

A slight reaction for biliary matter seemed to show that there was no obstruction of the bile ducts. These tests about used up the four very small pills of the Lama's ordure.

Very respectfully and sincerely yours, (signed) M.W. Mew (Bourke, *Scatalogic*, pp. 52-53).

Obviously, Bourke had already told Dr. Mew ahead of time that what he would be analyzing was 'ordure' of a Tibetan lama. There is nothing (aside from the "slight reaction for biliary matter") in Mew's *scientific* analysis to persuade us that the *ril-bu* he examined contained anything more than the flour which, as Rockhill says in a quote on the preceding page (p. 51), is the primary ingredient used in their manufacture.

It is entirely possible, however, that some *ril-bu* (the *gsang-chab ril-bu* mentioned in the appendix), might contain a hint of the urine of a highly revered lama. In recent times, disciples of certain lamas have been known to sip a little of their urine as an expression of strong devotion (see, for example, the biography of the late Geshe Rabten). Here devotion is the primary factor, not a particular fondness (or unusual aversion) for the ingestion of urine. Devotion overcomes natural aversion.

<sup>73</sup> This is not to say that many of our sub-societies do not have strong relic and saint cults. Tibetan Buddhism itself is fast forming sub-societies in North America, Europe, Australia, Taiwan, Singapore, etc. It would be interesting to know to what degree these groups preserve facets of the Tibetan relic cults.

<sup>74</sup> What Turner (*Image*) called "flow" (a unitive experience emerging in the course of play and worship) and what Eliade (*Cosmos*) would have described as a re-connection with mythic, primordial time. Although these types of terms and their accompanying explanations might be helpful in some sense, still they are at best partial, generalized, and therefore inadequate representations for a spectrum of possible personal experiences of the sacred(s?) which are *terribly* difficult to 'explain', or even to describe. I propose that the undefinable is best left undefined, or maybe left to define itself within its own appropriate context. That which is not defined is not therefore unknown.

<sup>75</sup> Anon. *Gnad-kyi Them-bu*, p. 42.4.

<sup>76</sup> Tibetan title: *Sku-'bum Mthong-ba-rang-grol Dkar-chag Mdor-bsdus: Don Gsal Me-long*. This work is found in Nam-mkha'-jigs-med, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, pp. 437-59.

<sup>77</sup> The two defilements, or 'veils', are, according to Mahâyâna, those due to afflictive emotions (*klesā*) and knowables (*jñeya*) which are countered by the two accumulations of Merit (*puṇya*) and Total Knowledge (*Jñāna*) respectively.

<sup>78</sup> These eight great cemeteries are often depicted in one of the outermost circles of mandalas, restricting, but what is considered more important, permitting access.

<sup>79</sup> Literally, 'vessel world' (*snod-kyi 'jig-rten/ = bhâjanaloka*) which contains the 'living beings world' (*bcud-kyi 'jig-rten/ = sattvaloka*). The Tibetan word *bcud* emphasizes the *vital* aspect, meaning the life essence conceived as a sort of sap. I have avoided the word 'material' (for the word *snod*), since it functions within a different dialectical framework.

<sup>80</sup> *Dhâraṇi* (*Gzungs*) are rather like long mantras. Usually, they are extracted from sūtra rather than tantra literature. They are used for a wide variety of purposes, some of them quite this-worldly and magical.

<sup>81</sup> Tantras pertaining to the ninth Vehicle of the Nyingma school. *Btags-grol mthong-grol* means 'touch-liberation sight-liberation'.

<sup>82</sup> *Peking Kanjur*, no. 198. It seems that all the Uṣṇīṣa deities (Uṣṇīṣavijāya and Vimaloṣṇīṣa, in particular) are intended.

<sup>83</sup> The three divisions of Inner Method Tantras (Nang Thabs-kyi Rgyud), a classification of tantras particular to the Nyingma school.

<sup>84</sup> A chief disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha.

<sup>85</sup> A famous Tertön born in 1340, died 1396 (?). Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, p. 541.

<sup>86</sup> The central, rounded, part of the chorten.

<sup>87</sup> One of the four large chortens at Samye (Bsam-yas).

<sup>88</sup> Gyantse of the maps, a major trading center in southern Tibet.

<sup>89</sup> Perhaps the same place as the Rtsa-sgang of Roerich, *Blue Annals*, pp. 946, 948, 962-3, 965-6.

<sup>90</sup> This unusual word will appear again. See note 175, below.

<sup>91</sup> The human originator of the Nyingma Ati-yoga lineages.

<sup>92</sup> One of the twenty-five main Tibetan followers of Padmasambhava; Ferrari, *Mk'yen brtse's Guide*, p. 117.

<sup>93</sup> A preceding Buddha, i.e., one who preceded Śākyamuni Buddha. His relics are said to be contained in the chorten of Bodhnath (which Tibetans call Bya-rung-kha-shor), just outside of Kathmandu, Nepal.

<sup>94</sup> Rtsa-ri. Holy place in southern Tibet renowned for its beautiful and dangerous natural features.

<sup>95</sup> Gtsang-pa Rgya-ras-pa Ye-shes-rdo-rje (1161-1211 A.D.), disciple of the Gling-ras-pa who founded the Drukpa ('Brug-pa) branch of the Kargyudpa school. He 'opened' the Hidden Country of Tsari. 'Hidden countries' have been discussed *supra*.

<sup>96</sup> A contemporary of the author, he lived 1583-1656. See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, p. 722. He was a famous Tertön.

<sup>97</sup> A celebrated Buddha image brought to Tibet by the Chinese wife of Srong-btsan-sgam-po (reigned ca. 620-649).

<sup>98</sup> Note 85, above.

<sup>99</sup> Elixir or *bdud-rtsi* is used to render the Sanskrit *amṛta*, which literally means 'deathless'. The Tibetan word frequently refers to the transfiguration, transubstantiation, transformation or what-have-you of various disgusting substances or deluded psychological constituents (the *skandhas*, *āyatana*s, etc.) into pure and beneficial 'substances' (the *bdud-rtsi lnga* = *pañcāmṛta*) Total Knowledges (Yeshes/ = Jñāna). These alchemical denotations should be kept clear, while a literal representation of the Sanskrit word behind the Tibetan as 'deathless' could not convey this essential import. Often translated 'ambrosia', 'nectar', and so forth.

<sup>100</sup> One of the most famous Mad Saints (Smyon-pa) who lived 1455-1529. His biography was translated into French by Rolf A. Stein, and more recently, into English by Keith Dowman, and into German by Andreas Kretschmar.

<sup>101</sup> Two very early Tertons about whom relatively little has been written. Sangs-rgyas-bla-ma is said to be the first Terton (although here we should specify that he is said to be the earlist Terton of the Nyingma school, since Bonpo history has claims to even earlier Tertons). He was active in the last half of the tenth century.

<sup>102</sup> Another, more famous Terton who lived 1403-1478. Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, pp. 583-5.

<sup>103</sup> Two of several very famous Mad Saints active in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. Gtsang-smyon is especially remembered as the editor of the most popular biography of Milarepa. He lived 1452-1507.

<sup>104</sup> The tenth century Indian originator of the Kargyudpa lineages.

<sup>105</sup> The fifth Karma Kargyudpa Hierarch, or Black Hat (Zhwa Nag), usually known as De-bzhin-gshegs-pa (= Tathāgata), lived from 1384 to 1415. See Roerich, *Blue Annals*, pp. 506 ff.

<sup>106</sup> A mythical bird, enemy of the snake-like *nāga* spirits.

<sup>107</sup> See Bernbaum, *The Way to Shambhala*, p. 69. The life of Lha-btsun Nam-mkha'-jigs-med is told in Dargyay, *Rise of Esoteric*, pp. 166-9. But it is important to note that "Sikkim" should be substituted in all places where "Bhutan" is mentioned. This is a simple case of misidentification.

<sup>108</sup> Zhu-chen, *Collected Writings*, vol. 7, pp. 305-315. Full Tibetan title is *De-bzhin-gshegs-pa'i Byang-chub-chen-po'i Mchod-rten-gyi Dkar-chag: Ngo-mtshar Me-long*.

<sup>109</sup> The full name given is 'Jam-pa'i-dbyangs-bsod-nams-bzang-po-bkra-shis-grags-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po.

<sup>110</sup> There is no subclassification being employed here. Bodily relics, clothing relics, and consecrated articles are all mixed together in no particular order.

<sup>111</sup> Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182-1251), the famous author of books on literary and scholastic subjects (including music) who was also important in the propagation of Buddhism among the Mongols.

<sup>112</sup> This title refers to Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan (1312-1375), teacher of the famous Tsongkhapa and Bu-ston, as well as author of a well known history of the Tibetan dynastic period, the *Rgyal-rabs Gsal-ba'i Me-long*.

<sup>113</sup> Images of deities or chortens made from clay and (generally) containing relics of some sort or another.

<sup>114</sup> An abbot of Ngor; 'Jam-dbyangs-blo-gter-dbang-po, *Rgyud-sde Kun Btus*, vol. 1, contents page.

<sup>115</sup> Thang-stong-rgyal-po Brtson-'grus-bzang-po, probably born in 1385, although his dates are problematic, is perhaps best known for his devotional works which gained popularity in all the sects and his building of chain suspension bridges.

<sup>116</sup> Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 858.

<sup>117</sup> Ngor Monastery (= Ngor E-wam Chos-sdings), the seat of a Sakya sub-school founded in the early fifteenth century.

<sup>118</sup> He plays a part in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and other scriptures. See Roerich, *Blue Annals*, p. 938, for references. The Sanskrit form of his name is Dharmodgata.

<sup>119</sup> Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092-1158), famous Sakya patriarch.

<sup>120</sup> Another important Sakya patriarch who lived from 1142 to 1182 A.D.

<sup>121</sup> Sa-skya Lo-tstsha-ba 'Jam-dbyangs-kun-dga'-bsod-nams-grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1485-1533). Became abbot of Sakya Monastery in 1498.

<sup>122</sup> Probably refers to the person in preceding note.

<sup>123</sup> Glo-bo Mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub (1420-1489), well known for his commentaries on the logical and scholastic treatises of Sa-skya Paṇḍi-ta.

<sup>124</sup> This is probably the sixty-fourth Chairholder (Khri-pa) of Ganden Monastery (from 1789 to 1795) by the same name. See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 201.

<sup>125</sup> This larger work with the title *Gsung Thor-bu-las: Rten Gsum-gyi Dkar-chag dang Skor Tshad-kyi Rim-pa Phyogs Bkod* is found in Gung-thang-pa, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, pp. 162-191. The part actually summarized here is found on pp. 179.1-181.1.

<sup>126</sup> One of the largest monasteries in Amdo, Bkra-shis-'khyil.

<sup>127</sup> Norbu, 'Gungthangpa's Text in Colloquial Amdowa', pp. 222-4.

<sup>128</sup> Atiśa (d. 1054) was the most celebrated Indian Master in Tibet at the time of the Second Propagation (Phyi Dar) of Buddhism and the spiritual father of the Kadampa (Bka'-gdams-pa) school which would later be absorbed into the Gelugpa school. In the late eleventh through early thirteenth centuries, the Kadampa had a strong influence on the other sects, the Kargyudpa in particular.

<sup>129</sup> See note 111, above.

<sup>130</sup> Probably the important teacher of Tsongkhapa from Amdo usually called Don-grub-rin-chen. See Wayman, *Calming the Mind*, p. 16.

<sup>131</sup> Lho-brag Grub-chen Nam-mkha'-rgyal-mtshan (1326-1401) was a Kadampa/Nyingma visionary, both teacher and follower of Tsongkhapa.

<sup>132</sup> Rwa Lo-tstshâ-ba Rdo-rje-grags was the most famous propagator of Yamântaka tantras in the tenth to eleventh centuries. His biography is one of the most widely read classics of Tibetan literature, although it has yet to be translated.

<sup>133</sup> See note 133, above.

<sup>134</sup> Rgyal-tshab-rje Dar-ma-rin-chen (1364-1432) was one of the two most celebrated followers of Tsongkhapa.

<sup>135</sup> Mkhas-grub-rje Dge-legs-dpal-bzang (1385-1438) was the other of the two most celebrated followers of Tsongkhapa. These two are routinely placed on the left and right hand sides of Tsongkhapa in religious iconography. Mkhas-grub-rje is the author of a work translated by Lessing and Wayman, *Mkhas Grub Rje's Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, in addition to countless other works.

<sup>136</sup> 'Dul-'dzin-pa is almost certainly a reference to 'Dul-'dzin Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, the disciple of Tsongkhapa.

<sup>137</sup> Ba-so Chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (1402-1473) was, like Rgyal-tshab-rje Dar-ma-rin-chen and Mkhas-grub-rje before him, a Chairholder of Ganden Monastery.

<sup>138</sup> This is a slightly abbreviated form of the name of Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (1579-1662) who was given the title of Panchen (Pan-chen) Lama by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. He served as abbot of both Tashilhunpo (in 1600) and Depung (in 1617). See Ferrari, *Mk'yen brtse's Guide*, p. 145.

<sup>139</sup> Rgyal-mtshan-seng-ge (1678-1756) was the fifty-third Chairholder of Ganden (from 1732 to 1738). See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 185.

<sup>140</sup> An unidentified person, evidently from the Dung-dkar Monastery in the Tromo Valley (Gro-mo Lung) in South Tibet between Sikkim and Bhutan.

<sup>141</sup> Probably the abbot of Bya-khyung Monastery in Amdo who is intended here was Rtsa-ba Blo-bzang-rgyal-mtshan (1700-1785), a student of Lcang-skya (see following note). See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 560.

<sup>142</sup> The Second Lcang-skya Incarnate of Peking, Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje (1717-1786), alias Ye-shes-bstan-pa'i-sgron-me. One of his biographies has been edited and summarized in Kämpfe, *Ni ma'i 'od zer*.

<sup>143</sup> Bka'-'gyur-ba No-mon-han. Bka'-'gyur-ba is a title used for any lama who is known to have read the entire Kanjur or one who frequently gives ritual reading authorizations (*lung*) for the Kanjur (the collection of sūtras and tantras in over a hundred volumes). Therefore, it is difficult to know which of the many such lamas of Tibet and Mongolia might be intended here.

<sup>144</sup> Not identified.

<sup>145</sup> Also called Dkon-mchog-'jigs-med-dbang-po (1728-1791). The Second 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa incarnate, he also signed his name as Ye-shes-brtson-'grus-grags-pa'i-sde. Several of his works have been translated into English. He is especially known to Tibetan monks as author of most of the monastic textbooks (*yig-cha*) in use at the Gomang Datsang of Depung Monastery (among others). Like the other 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa incarnates, he resided primarily at Tashikhyil (note 126, above).

<sup>146</sup> Alias Khri-rgan-tshang, he was a pupil of the first 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa Incarnation.

<sup>147</sup> Not identified. All of the unidentified persons in the following text will be left unfootnoted.

<sup>148</sup> This is most certainly the Smin-gling No-mon-han Ngag-dbang-'phrin-las-rgyal-po (1678-1739), a student of Lcang-skya Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje (note 142, above). See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 583.

<sup>149</sup> The sixteenth Chairholder of Ganden (1473-1539). See Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 136.

<sup>150</sup> Nam-mkha'-bzang-po was the fifty-fifth Chairholder of Ganden from 1746 until 1750 when he died. He is also known as the first Zam-tsha Incarnation.

<sup>151</sup> In other words, Blo-bzang-bkra-shis, in whose memory this chorten was built.

<sup>152</sup> This also refers back to the Blo-bzang-bkra-shis to whom the chorten was dedicated.

<sup>153</sup> *Ring-bsrel mam bzhi*. For these, see the chorten consecration text of Lcang-skya Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-chos-ldan mentioned below. This four-fold classification is most usual with Gelugpa writers.

<sup>154</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 176.4-5.

<sup>155</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 176.6. 'Urine' pellets also appear on pp. 177.1 and 183.1.

<sup>156</sup> Smṛtiśrījñāna is an important transitional figure in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. This Indian master was translating tantras in eastern Tibet when Rinchen-bzang-po was introducing the 'new' translations in western Tibet and, so, he is considered as the last of the 'old' tantra translators.

<sup>157</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 177.3, ff.

<sup>158</sup> See especially Ardussi, 'Brewing and Drinking', p. 119, for other beer making metaphors, which were quite popular in Tibet, a country with many beer drinkers.

<sup>159</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 181.

<sup>160</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 182.1.

<sup>161</sup> Full title: *Mchog-gzigs Bla-ma Dam-pa G.yung-drung-phun-tshogs-kyi Gdung-rten Dkar-chag: Lha'i Sgra Snyan*. Contained in Kong-sprul, *Collected Works*, vol. 11, pp. 321-41.

<sup>162</sup> See E. Gene Smith's long introduction to Kong-sprul, *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia*, for the best English source on the life of Kong-sprul.

<sup>163</sup> Kvaerne, 'Chronological', pp. 220-221.

<sup>164</sup> Evidently the same as Rang-grol Bla-ma Rgyal-mtshan, born 1328 according to Kvaerne, 'Chronological', no. 119.

<sup>165</sup> Abbot of Sman-ri Monastery from 1810 to 1835 who lived 1785 to 1835. It was he who ordained Kong-sprul as a Bonpo monk. Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 7, p. 642.

<sup>166</sup> Lived 996-1054 A.D. (?): Kvaerne, 'Chronological', nos. 67, 76, 80.

<sup>167</sup> The text reads Chog-sgron. She is a female saint, since Khyung-za means 'wife from the Khyung clan'. Chos-sgron is a rather common woman's name. Unfortunately, I have not been able to identify her. The Khyung clan was also the clan of Kong-sprul himself.

<sup>168</sup> Born 1700, famous author and major figure in the 'New Bon' movement. See Martin, 'Bonpo Canons', for biographical material.

<sup>169</sup> In an 'extra' volume of the Suzuki reprint of the *Peking Kanjur and Tanjur* (vol. 164, pp. 83 ff.; no. 6299). This work is the subject of a short article by Jampa Kalsang called 'Grundsätzliches zur Füllung von mC'od Rten' which should be consulted for further details.

<sup>170</sup> In Lessing and Wayman, *Mkhas Grub Rje's Fundamentals*, pp. 106-107 is another three-fold classification of relics:

- 1) Dharmabody relics: *dhâraṇī*.
- 2) Remains (*sku-gdung*) relics: mustard seed sized relics which come from the remains.
- 3) Clothing (*sku-bal*) relics: images.

<sup>171</sup> *Ring-bsrel Lnga'i Gzhugs Tshul Lag-len: Tshogs Gnyis Rgya-mtsho*. Found in *Gzungs 'Bul Lag-len*, pp. 225-309. 'Bri-gung Rig-'dzin was a Drikung ('Bri-gung) Kargyudpa who held many Nyingma lineages. He was also considered to be a Tertön.

<sup>172</sup> *Peking Kanjur*, no. 998. This and a few other short, closely related sūtras, were the subjects of Bendor, 'Miniature Stūpas, Images and Relics'.

<sup>173</sup> The concept of Dharmabody (Dharmakāya) is a very important one. In this context, it may suffice to say that the 'Dharma' that is incorporated includes both the Word of the Buddha (including scriptures) and the 'phenomenon' of the world. These two are identical from a devotional point of view, since everything that is of any substance in the universe is found in scripture, and everything that is found in scripture is found in reality.

<sup>174</sup> *'Phags-pa gsum*. This refers to: 1) Hearers. 2) Solitary Realizers. 3) Bodhisattvas who have reached the Stage of Direct Vision (Mthong Lam/Darśana-mārga) according to the Mahāyāna's generally accepted doctrine of the Five Staged Path derived from the *Abhisamayālamkāra* (itself based on the *Prajñāpāramitā*)



and associated literature. This is the technical meaning of ‘saint’ (*‘phags-pal* = *ārya*) in Tibetan Buddhism, although the relevance of this technical meaning for the popular recognition of saints is at the very least problematic.

<sup>175</sup> This list differs slightly from the list in the third chapter of the *Skū-gdung* ‘*Bar-ba*’ (already cited). These curious terms were evidently formed by Tibetans who falsely etymologized the loan word *sha-ri-ram* to mean ‘flesh’ (*sha*, in Tibetan) *ri-ram* and, on that basis formed further compounds. This cannot necessarily prove that there were no Indic terms or items behind them, although it may lend itself to that conclusion. (This point is discussed in Sde-srid, ‘*Dzam-gling-rgyan-gcig*’, pp. 543-4.) Compare the categorization in the rediscoveries of Padma-las-’brel-rtsal (1291-1315?) called the *Mkha*’-’gro *Snying-thig-gi Chos-skor* (p. 70.6): *sha-ri-ram*, *chu-ri-ram*, *ba-ri-ram*, *nya-ri-ram* and *pan-rtsa-ri* (= on p. 71.3, *pan-tsa-ram*; p. 131.6, *panytsa-ram*). There are minor, not especially significant differences between this presentation of the ‘signs of saintly death’ and that in the *Skū-gdung* ‘*Bar-ba*’. The *Skū-gdung* ‘*Bar-ba*’ as well as the *Mkha*’-’gro *Snying-thig* are dateable at the very latest to the time of Klong-chen Rab-’byams-pa Dri-med-’od-zer (1308-1363) who was the first to publicize them. Both the seventeen tantras (of which the *Skū-gdung* ‘*Bar-ba*’ is one) and the *Mkha*’-’gro *Snying-thig* belong to the Precepts Class (Man-ngag Sde) of the Ati-yoga Vehicle—the former as the main texts of the unbroken oral tradition (Bka’-ma), the latter as one of four cycles which represent the Rediscovered (Gter-ma) tradition of the Precepts Class. Therefore, it is nothing strange that these collections should share some common contents. For insights into the lives of Padma-las-’brel-rtsal and Klong-chen-pa, see Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>176</sup> An excellent and highly recommended introduction to the business of Tibetan Buddhist consecration is Gyalzur and Verwey, ‘Spells on the Life-Wood’. It is, however, mostly limited to the pre-consecration rituals of preparing and inserting the sacred contents. For the consecration proper, see Sharpa Tulku, ‘Ritual of Consecration’, and Panchen Ötöl, ‘The Consecration Ritual.’ Yael Bentor, has devoted her dissertation research to this topic. See Bentor, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Consecration Ritual*.

<sup>177</sup> This work, entitled *Rten-la Gzhug* ‘*Bul-ba*’i *Lag-len Lugs-srol Kun Gsal Dri Bral Nor-bu Chu-shel-gyi Me-long*, is contained in Kong-sprul, *Rgya-chen Bka’ Mdzod*, vol. 12, pp. 97-153 (including a few related appendices). The passage rendered here is found on pp. 101.5-102.

<sup>178</sup> See Schopen, ‘*Bodhigarbhālankāralakṣa*’, which contains a study of various problems surrounding this text and its history, which is quite complicated (evidently, to judge from Schopen’s article, Kong-sprul’s five-fold classification does not in fact occur in the version of the *Bodhigarbhālankāra* which he [Schopen] used; see also note 64, above). This article also has a very valuable discussion of relic classifications which should be consulted. This work, cited by Kong-sprul under the title (*Rgya-nag* *gsar-gyur*, ‘new translation [from] Chinese’) *Byang-chub Snying-po Rgyan-gyi Gzungs-kyi Cho-ga Zhib-mo*, is cited also in Sde-srid, ‘*Dzam-gling-rgyan-gcig*’. Studies of this text and the problems associated with it may be expected in the near future.



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